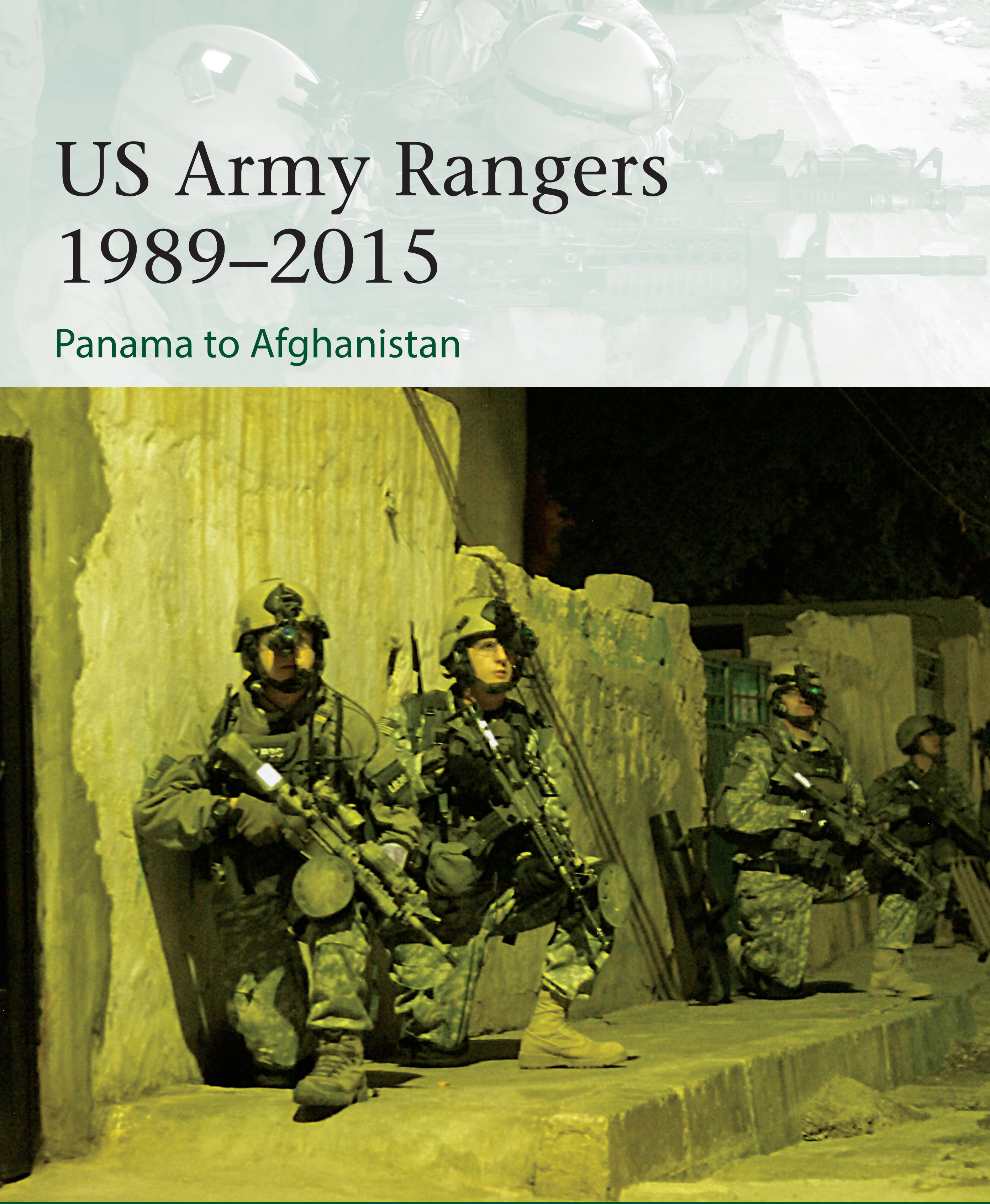
US Army Rangers 1989–2015

Panama to Afghanistan



LEIGH NEVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

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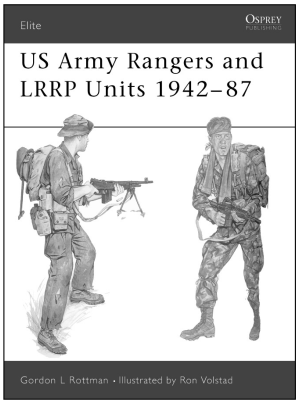
Other titles in the series



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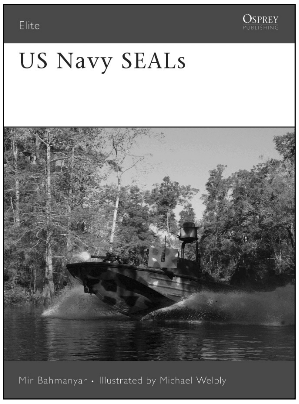

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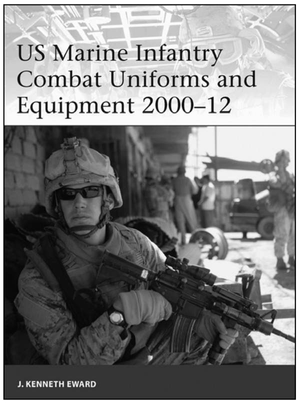

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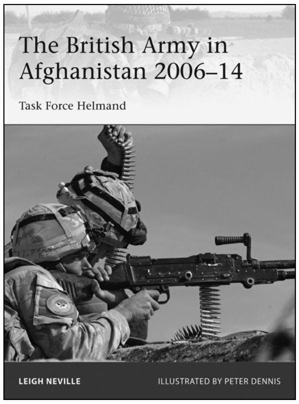

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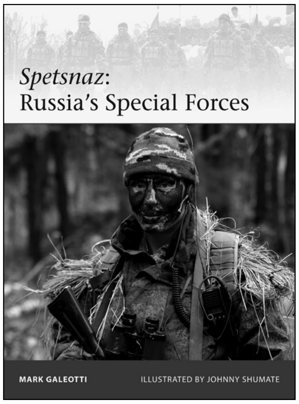

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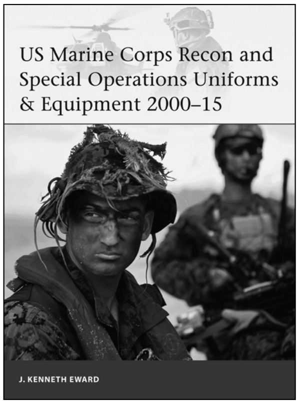

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Panama to Afghanistan

LEIGH NEVILLE

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to
Sergeant Major Lawrence ("Larry") Boivin, 1st SFOD-Delta
November 24, 1964–November 11, 2012

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ARTIST'S NOTE

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the color plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All inquiries should be addressed to:

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

Historical background: World War II, Korea, Vietnam ▪ Activation of the Regiment

RIP, RASP, AND THE REGIMENT 7

Ranger School ▪ Ranger Assessment and Selection Program ▪ Organization of 75th Ranger Regiment ▪ Joint Special Operations Command ▪ Operation "Urgent Fury," Grenada, 1983

OPERATIONS: 11

Operation "Just Cause," Panama, 1989 ▪ Task Force Red-Romeo ▪ Task Force Red-Tango ▪ Follow-on missions

Operation "Desert Storm," Arabian Gulf, 1991: Operation "Elusive Concept" ▪ Operation "Ranger Run 1"

Operation "Gothic Serpent," Somalia, 1993: Tactics of Task Force Ranger ▪ "The Battle of the Black Sea" ▪ Aftermath

Operation "Enduring Freedom," Afghanistan, 2001–present day: Initial missions ▪ 2002: Takur Ghar ▪ 2003–2005: minimal presence ▪ 2003–2008: increasing tempo ▪ 2009–2011: Afghan Surge & Team Merrill ▪ 2011–2013: courageous restraint

Operation "Iraqi Freedom," Iraq, 2003–2010: March 26 & 27, 2003: Objectives Beaver & Serpent ▪ April 1–9: the Haditha Dam ▪ Other April operations ▪ June 11: Objective Reindeer ▪ 2004–2007: Task Force North ▪ 2007–2008: Task Force 17 ▪ 2009–2010: the drawdown

EVOLUTION OF THE REGIMENT 54

Relationship with JSOC ▪ Expansion of capabilities and Mission Essential Tasks

WEAPONS 57

Pistols ▪ Assault rifles & carbines ▪ Marksman & sniper rifles ▪ Squad automatic weapons ▪ Machine guns ▪ Grenade launchers & hand grenades ▪ Rockets and mortars

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 63

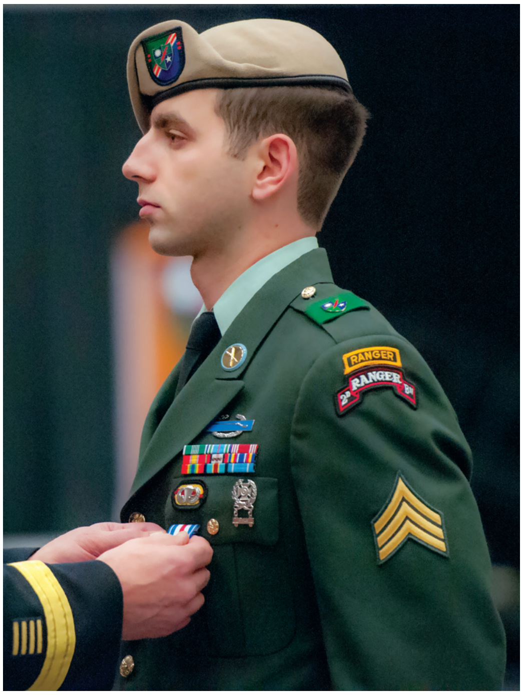
INDEX 64

INTRODUCTION

The story of the modern US Army 75th Ranger Regiment is one of hard-fought evolution. While maintaining both its traditional operational roles and the links that it proudly claims to the original Rogers' Rangers of the French-Indian War in the 1750s, in the 21st century the Regiment has charted a dramatic new course for itself by demonstrating its prowess and potential.

This book serves as an updating sequel to Gordon L. Rottman's masterful Elite 13, *US Army Rangers & LRRP Units 1942–1987*, published by Osprey nearly 30 years ago, and thus the earlier history of the Rangers will be touched upon only very briefly here. The modern incarnation of the Rangers grew from the cauldron of World War II. The 1st Ranger Battalion was formed six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, modeled upon and initially trained by the British Commandos, to conduct raiding missions behind enemy lines. Indeed, the first combat action in which a few Rangers took part was alongside the British and Canadians in the bloody Dieppe raid on the French coast in August 1942. Six US Ranger battalions eventually saw service during the war, in North Africa, Italy, Europe and the Pacific. They were often tasked with securing beachheads and landing zones, or capturing key terrain to allow follow-on forces to exploit their gains.

Perhaps best known, and most characteristic of the Ranger spirit, was the assault against the German artillery position at Pointe du Hoc, Normandy, on June 6, 1944 by LtCol James Rudder's 2nd Ranger Battalion. Here, after an opposed amphibious landing, they scaled under fire a steep 90-foot cliff using ropes and grappling hooks. When they reached the top



March 20, 2013: Sgt Peter Cimpoes, 2d Bn/75th Ranger Regt, receives the Silver Star. On October 12, 2012 in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, Sgt Cimpoes climbed onto the roof of a compound to rescue two wounded comrades. He killed three insurgents who were closing in on the wounded men, and suppressed two enemy firing points, thus allowing the evacuation of the casualties. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Rangers have been awarded one Medal of Honor, one Distinguished Service Cross, 49 Silver Stars, more than 300 Bronze Stars, and more than 600 Purple Hearts.

Sergeant Cimpoes wears Class A uniform with the tan Ranger beret and regimental flash and crest; note at his left shoulder the "Ranger" tab above the 2/75th's scroll, and on his epaulet a green loop (Leader's Identification Insignia) bearing the Regiment's crest. The tan beret was authorized for the Regiment in 2001 after the Rangers' traditional black beret, worn (at first unofficially) since the 1950s, was authorized by the Army Chief of Staff as an Army-wide headgear – a controversial decision. Above Sgt Cimpoes' medal ribbons note the Combat Infantryman Badge; below the ribbons are his parachute jump wings on the Regiment's colored oval backing, and an Expert Marksman qualification. (Courtesy US Army; photo Staff Sgt David Chapman)

The Ranger Creed

***R**ecognizing that I volunteered as a Ranger, fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession, I will always endeavor to uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps of the Rangers.*

***A**cknowledging the fact that a Ranger is a more elite Soldier who arrives at the cutting edge of battle by land, sea, or air, I accept the fact that as a Ranger my country expects me to move further, faster and fight harder than any other Soldier.*

***N**ever shall I fail my comrades. I will always keep myself mentally alert, physically strong and morally straight and I will shoulder more than my share of the task whatever it may be, one-hundred-percent and then some.*

***G**allantly will I show the world that I am a specially selected and well-trained Soldier. My courtesy to superior officers, neatness of dress and care of equipment shall set the example for others to follow.*

***E**nergetically will I meet the enemies of my country. I shall defeat them on the field of battle, for I am better trained and will fight with all my might. Surrender is not a Ranger word. I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country.*

***R**eadily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission though I be the lone survivor.*

Rangers lead the way!

The beret flash of the 75th Ranger Regiment, bearing a version of the original crest of the World War II "Merrill's Marauders"; and the Regiment's jump-wings oval.

and engaged the defenders the Rangers discovered that the Germans had moved the artillery some 600 yards inland. Clearing the battery position and patrolling southward, they found the guns and succeeded in disabling them. Although reduced to little more than company strength, the battalion established a perimeter and subsequently fought off numerous counterattacks until relieved two days later.

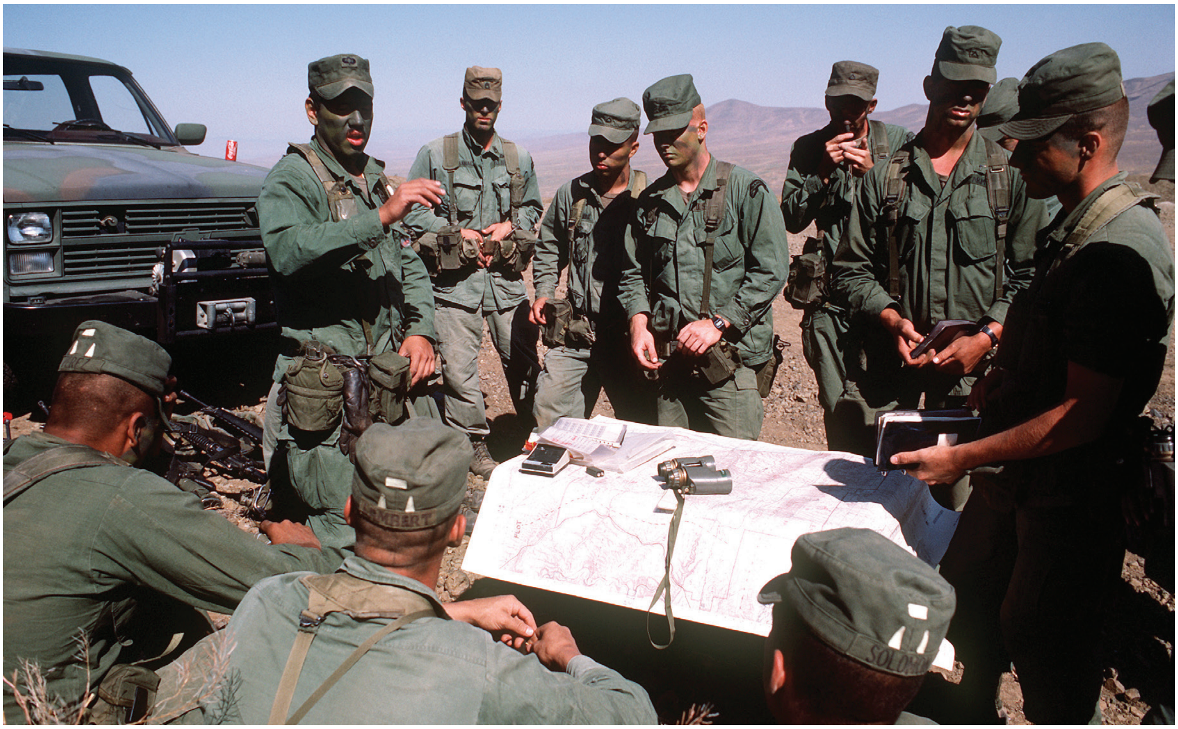
In the Pacific theater, on January 30, 1945 Rangers also carried out one of the largest prisoner-of-war (POW) rescues in history. After a long jungle approach march and a rendezvous with Filipino guerrillas, LtCol Henry A. Mucci led a reinforced company of his 6th Ranger Bn in an attack against a POW camp at Cabanatuan on Luzon, where prisoners were in danger of execution by retreating Japanese forces. The raiders successfully freed and escorted to safety more than 500 Allied POWs, inflicting heavy Japanese casualties for the loss of only two Rangers killed and ten wounded.

After World War II the US Army saw no continuing need for special operations forces, and the Rangers were disbanded. Early in the Korean War the formation of volunteer Airborne Ranger Companies was ordered, and a Ranger Training Center (Airborne) was established at Fort Benning, Georgia in September 1950. By February 1951 some 17 companies had been raised, of which six deployed in Korea, but for various reasons they were inactivated soon afterward. A Ranger training facility was maintained, however, contributing to the creation of Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) companies in the 1950s–60s; modeled on the British Special Air Service (SAS), these later proliferated due to the demands of the Vietnam War. In 1960 the Rangers' historical lineage and battle honors had been granted to the new US Army Special Forces, so in 1969 the LRRP companies were granted the lineage of the 75th Infantry Regt, inheritors of the identity of the wartime 475th Infantry Regt ("Merrill's Marauders") who had earned renown in Burma. While continuing to deploy separately, all LRRP units were redesignated as companies of the 75th Infantry and added "Ranger" to their titles.

The post-Vietnam administrative history of these companies was complex, but on January 31, 1974 the 1st Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry was activated at Fort Benning, followed that October by the 2d Battalion at Fort Lewis, Washington. These units were to be trained to a high standard as light infantry for direct-action missions of limited duration in a wide range of physical environments. These missions would include raids against high-value targets including airfields and command, control and communications facilities, and the interdiction of lines of communication. Originally they were also intended for both LRRP and rear-area security tasks, but these were later dropped, being replaced latterly by support for counterterrorist operations and hostage-rescue missions. To meet these requirements, intense and diversified unit training would be accompanied by instruction in specialist individual skills beyond those normally mastered by conventional infantry.

Following the failure of Operation "Eagle Claw," the attempted rescue of hostages from the occupied US Embassy in Tehran, Iran in April 1980, that December the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) was established to coordinate highly classified preparations and operations by Special Mission Units. The SMUs that have been publicly identified are the US Army's 1st Special Forces Operations Detachment-Delta; Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU) or SEAL Team 6; and the US Air Force's 24th Special Tactics Squadron. Units from the Army's 75th Ranger Regt and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regt (SOAR) come under JSOC control when they are deployed as part of Joint Special Operations Task Forces.

A classic image of a 1980s-era Ranger in olive drab fatigues, displaying a subdued-color "Ranger" tab on his patrol cap. Note the Colt Carbine, a precursor to the M4 and M4A1. (Courtesy US Army)



1987: Rangers from 2/75 are instructed in tactical air control procedures by a US Air Force Enlisted Tactical Air Controller (ETAC). The Rangers wear their characteristic olive drab fatigues and patrol caps – note the reflective "cat's eyes." This clothing was phased out later that year and replaced with Woodland-pattern camouflage items. (Courtesy US Air Force; photo Tech Sgt Bill Thompson)

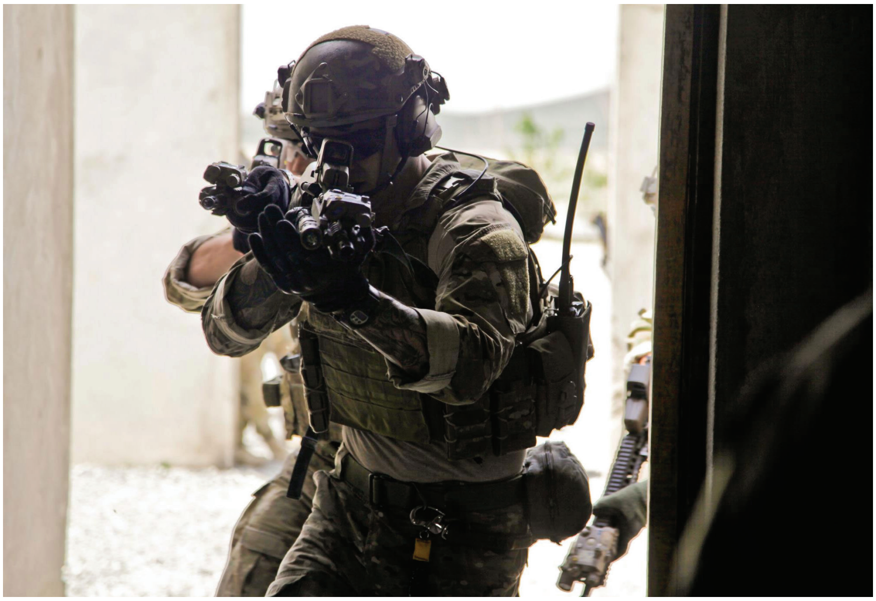
On October 25, 1983, as part of Operation "Urgent Fury," some 500 men from the 1st and 2d Ranger Bns parachuted onto Point Salines Airport on the Caribbean island of Grenada, to secure the safety of some 360 US students during a period of bloody unrest. Following this success, a 3d Ranger Bn and regimental HQ elements were activated at Fort Benning on October 3, 1984. On April 17, 1986 the 75th Inf Regt (Ranger) was redesignated the 75th Ranger Regt, and presented with the lineage and honors of the World War II and Korean War Ranger units.

RIP, RASP, AND THE REGIMENT

Ranger School is a famous institution within the US Army, which since the 1950s has taught company officers and NCOs infantry patrol and small-unit tactics and leadership in the field. It is *not* a selection or training program for the 75th Ranger Regt, but is open to all within the US Army, and indeed to selected students from other services.[1] The course is challenging, and graduation rates since 2007 have been less than 50 percent. All who complete the 61-day course and earn the "Ranger" shoulder tab are considered Rangers, whether or not they serve within the 75th Ranger Regt (known simply as "the Regiment"). Conversely, not all those who serve within the Regiment have to complete Ranger School, although advancement within the Regiment depends on gaining the tab, and it is mandatory for Ranger officers and sergeants.

---

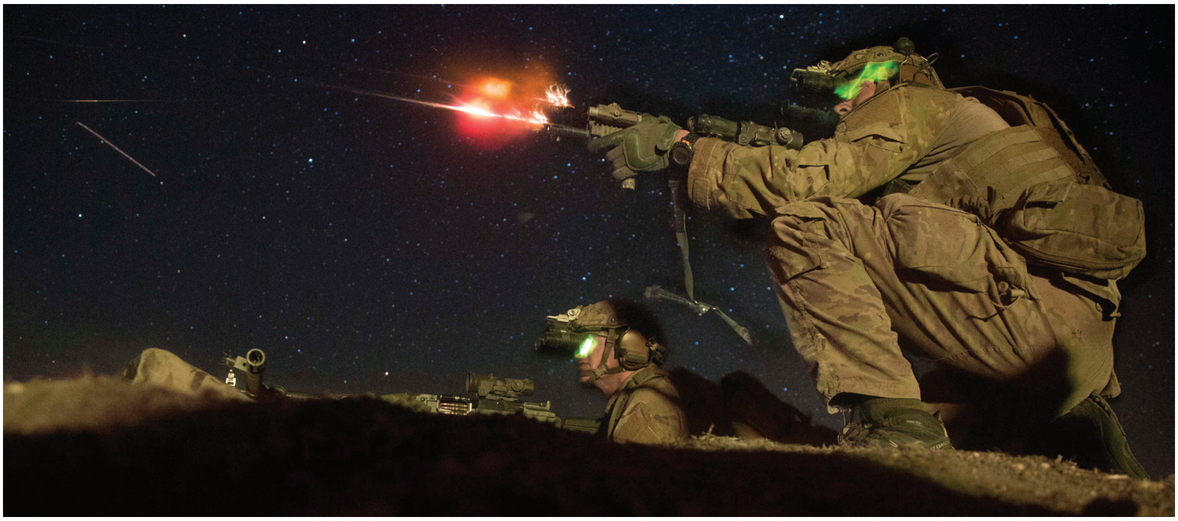
[1] For details of the course see Elite 13, *US Army Rangers & LRRP Units 1942–87*, pages 48–51. Over some 1,000 hours of practical combat training, about half of it at night, the course teaches a wide range of skills, and includes extensive mountain/forest, jungle/swamp, and desert phases.



A Ranger from 1/75, undergoing pre-deployment Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) training, presents the business end of his Special Operations-Peculiar Modification (SOPMOD) Block 2 M4A1 carbine, fitted with an EOTech optic, LA-5 (AN/PEQ-15) infrared illuminator, and Scout weapon light. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

Soldiers must complete a separate and very rigorous selection program before they can hope to earn the coveted tan beret and Ranger unit scroll of the 75th Ranger Regiment. (For the Ranger tab and unit scrolls, see Plate B.) Known until 2010 as the Ranger Indoctrination Program (RIP), the selection process for enlisted soldiers and junior NCOs (grades E-1 to E-5) is now called the Ranger Assessment & Selection Program (RASP) Level 1, and is run by the Ranger Selection & Training Company, part of the Regimental Special Troops Battalion (see below, "Organization"). RIP was a four-week program (the fourth week, with an emphasis on combat shooting, was added in 2004); its replacement RASP lasts eight weeks in total, divided into two distinct phases (see below). Again, dropout rates among candidates are high; RASP 1 intakes, especially in wintertime, have historically suffered anything up to 75 percent attrition during the program. Since senior NCOs, warrant officers, and officers in the 75th Ranger Regt must have already passed Ranger School, their RASP 2 selection lasts only 21 days.

Rangers of 2/75 during pre-deployment night combat training at Camp Roberts, California in 2014. The green haze is from the AN/PVS-15 night-vision goggles fitted to the recently issued Ops-Core ballistic helmet. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Steven Hitchcock)



RASP requirements

- Minimum score of 240 on the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) – 80 percent in each event.
- Must complete 5-mile run in 40 minutes or less.
- Must complete 12-mile footmarch in 3 hours or less, with a 35lb rucksack.
- Must successfully complete the Ranger Swim Ability Evaluation (RSAE) while displaying confidence in the water.
- Must complete full psychological screening, with no major psychological profiles identified by the Regimental Psychologist.
- RASP 1 candidates must pass security screening with the ability to receive a SECRET clearance. RASP 2 candidates must have a minimum of an Interim SECRET clearance prior to attending the course.
- Must pass the Commander's Board. For RASP 1 candidates this event is for selected individuals based on peer evaluations, cadre assessment, and overall performance. The Commander's Board is a requirement for all RASP 2 candidates.
- RASP 1 candidates must successfully complete the RASP 1 Program of Instruction (POI) in order to serve in the 75th Ranger Regiment.

Candidates must be Airborne qualified before they begin RASP. They must also complete a Pre RASP program that ensures the candidate meets basic Ranger requirements. The first half of RASP is similar to the older RIP, and is principally concerned with assessing the physical and psychological capacity of a candidate to become a Ranger. Some formal instruction is included in core small arms – the M4A1 rifle, the Mk 46, M240B, and M2 machine guns, and the standard enemy AK47 assault rifle. Parachute refresher training is also given, together with instruction in Ranger history and traditions, and the Ranger First Responder (RFR) field first aid course.

The second phase is more instructional, with a week spent on advanced marksmanship and close-quarter battle (CQB) shooting; the Ranger Assault Breacher Course, which teaches basic explosive and manual breaching techniques; the Special Operations Combatives Program for hand-to-hand combat; and mobility training with the Ranger version of the Ground Mobility Vehicle (GMV), the special-operations variant of the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle light truck (HMMWV aka the "Humvee"). More recently this segment includes familiarization with the M1126 Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle (ICV) and various Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) platforms. In essence, Phase 2 prepares the potential Ranger for combat, since he may be deployed almost immediately after graduation and posting to a Ranger battalion.

A Ranger element fast-roping from an MH-47E Chinook during an exercise at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in 2010. Rangers train for insertion by parachute, fast-roping, or landing directly from helicopters of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. (Courtesy US Army; photo Trish Harris, USASOC DCS PAO)

An MH-6 Little Bird helicopter transporting a fire team of Rangers during an exercise at Fort Bragg. Fast Rope Insertion/Extraction System (FRIES) mounts are fitted above the bench seats of the External Personnel System, which can carry up to six infantrymen. (Courtesy US Army; photo Trish Harris, USASOC DCS PAO)

Once the Ranger has successfully completed RASP 1, those with a communications Military Occupational Speciality (MOS), including forward observers, will be sent to the three-week Ranger radio telephone operator (RTO) course. Medics who pass RASP go on to advanced training at the six-week Pre Special Operations Combat Medic course, to prepare them for the nine-month Special Operations Combat Medic course. At the completion of these courses Ranger medics are better qualified than their civilian counterparts.

Rangers may also attend the Ranger Language Program, and any number of specialist military schools including Military Free Fall, SCUBA, and Survival-Evasion-Resistance-Escape (SERE) School. After a minimum of eight months within the Regiment, non-tabbed Rangers will be given the opportunity to attend the three-week Small Unit Ranger Tactics (SURT) course, as a precursor to attending Ranger School.

Organization

Today the Regiment is composed of three numbered Ranger battalions: 1/75 at Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia; 2/75 at Fort Lewis, Washington State; and 3/75 at Fort Benning, Georgia.

A Regimental Special Troops Battalion (RSTB) is also based at Fort Benning under the Regimental Headquarters. The RSTB was raised in 2006 to support the three Ranger battalions with specialist capabilities; it is an enabler, allowing the Regiment to conduct longer-term deployments, capable of a full range of special-operations missions. The RSTB comprises four companies: the Ranger Reconnaissance Company (RRC); the Ranger Communications Company, which provides state-of-the-art communications support; the Ranger Military Intelligence Company, which conducts human, signals, and imagery intelligence-gathering and analysis directly for the

A Ranger assault element using the fast-rope system of a FRIES-equipped MH-6 Little Bird for the last few feet of insertion onto the roof of a building that is unsuitable for an actual helicopter touchdown. The compact size of the MH-6, flown by 160th SOAR pilots of advanced skills, allows assault teams to be landed on small roofs or directly in the street outside a target. (Courtesy US Army; photo Trish Harris, USASOC DCS PAO) battalions; and the Ranger Selection & Training Company, responsible for RASP and SURT.

Each Ranger battalion is today composed of a headquarters and headquarters company; four rifle companies (the fourth, D Company, being added in 2007 due to the heightened operational tempo of the Regiment's deployments); and, since 2005, a logistics support company (E Company). A mortar platoon under the battalion HQ has 81mm and 120mm tubes that can be attached as needed to individual rifle companies and platoons.

Each rifle company comprises three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. The weapons platoon provides organic company-level indirect fire support from a section of two 60mm mortars, and antitank (AT) support from three AT teams equipped with the 84mm M3 Carl Gustav Ranger Antitank Weapons System (RAWS) recoilless rifle, the FGM-148 Javelin Antitank Guided Missile (ATGM), and the disposable 84mm AT-4 (M136) unguided antitank weapon. Prior to the end of the 1990s the weapons platoon was also home to a sniper section, which has since been reorganized into a sniper platoon at battalion level.

Each rifle platoon consists of a headquarters (including the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and RTO), three rifle squads, and a weapons squad (3x two-man machine-gun teams and a squad leader). A Ranger rifle squad at full strength is composed of nine men split into two fire teams. Depending on operational needs, the squad is supported by a machine-gun team from the weapons squad, and sometimes by a three-man antitank team drawn from the company's weapons platoon. A 60mm mortar team may also be attached, although these are often grouped.

Other assets are attached according to operational need. A Ranger platoon operating in Afghanistan, for example, would likely have its own military working dog team; at least one medic; an interpreter; an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) specialist; a sniper team from the battalion sniper platoon; a forward observer to direct organic mortars, or artillery such as the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS); an Air Force Combat Controller or Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC); and perhaps an attached Cultural Support Team to assist in interaction with Afghan civilians.

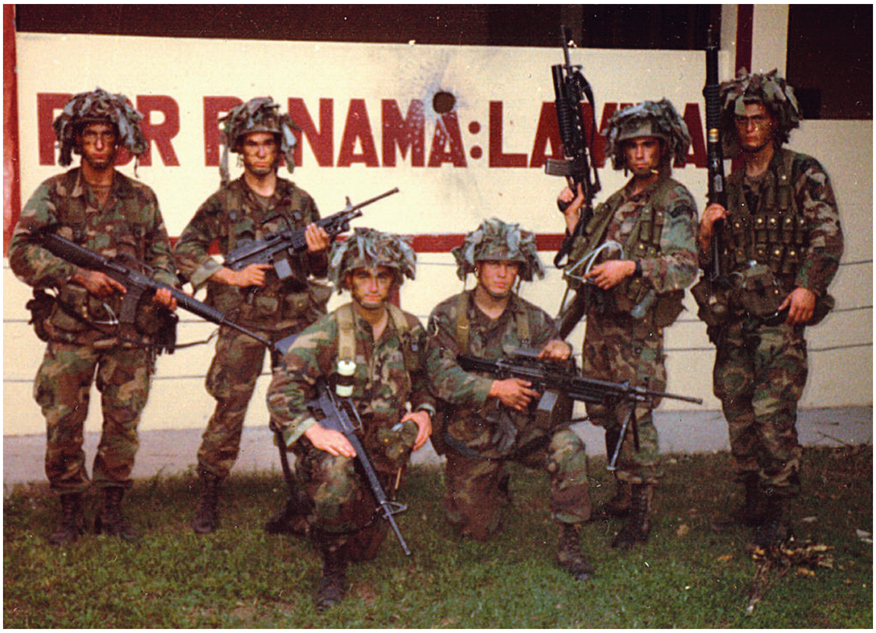
OPERATIONS

OPERATION "JUST CAUSE"

Panama, 1989

The United States invaded Panama on December 20, 1989 with the objective of securing US citizens who were under threat from the forces of Panamanian dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was himself wanted on drug-smuggling charges. Operation "Just Cause" (originally known by the far less dramatic codename of "Blue Spoon") would be the first time the entire 75th Ranger Regt deployed into combat together, and featured a major example of one of its traditional roles – the seizure of an airfield against opposition. The Rangers' missions would be some of the most dangerous and most critical of the entire operation. They would also herald the immediate future direction of the Regiment, with an emphasis on large-scale raiding parties

Rangers of 3/75 after seizing the Tocumen/Torrijos International Airport in Panama, December 1989. Note the scrim worn on their PASGT helmets as an IFF measure; sadly, however, a number of Rangers were still killed in blue-on-blue incidents. (Courtesy Dept of Defense)



intimately supported by the aviators of the 160th SOAR, and themselves operating in immediate support of special-mission units such as the Army's Delta Force. This would be the first but far from the last time that the Rangers operated directly under Joint Special Operations Command.

The Rangers operated as Task Force Red (as they later would in Afghanistan and Iraq). In contrast, the Navy SEALs of Team 6 were typically Task Force Blue, while Delta were Task Force Green. Under this umbrella organization, for Panama the Rangers were further divided into two component commands, Task Force Red-Romeo and Task Force Red-Tango.

Romeo was composed of two Ranger battalions – 2/75 (which provided the Ranger Ready Reaction Force at the time), and 3/75 less its C Co – with

A

PANAMA, ARABIAN GULF & SOMALIA, 1989–93

1: Operation "Just Cause," Panama, 1989

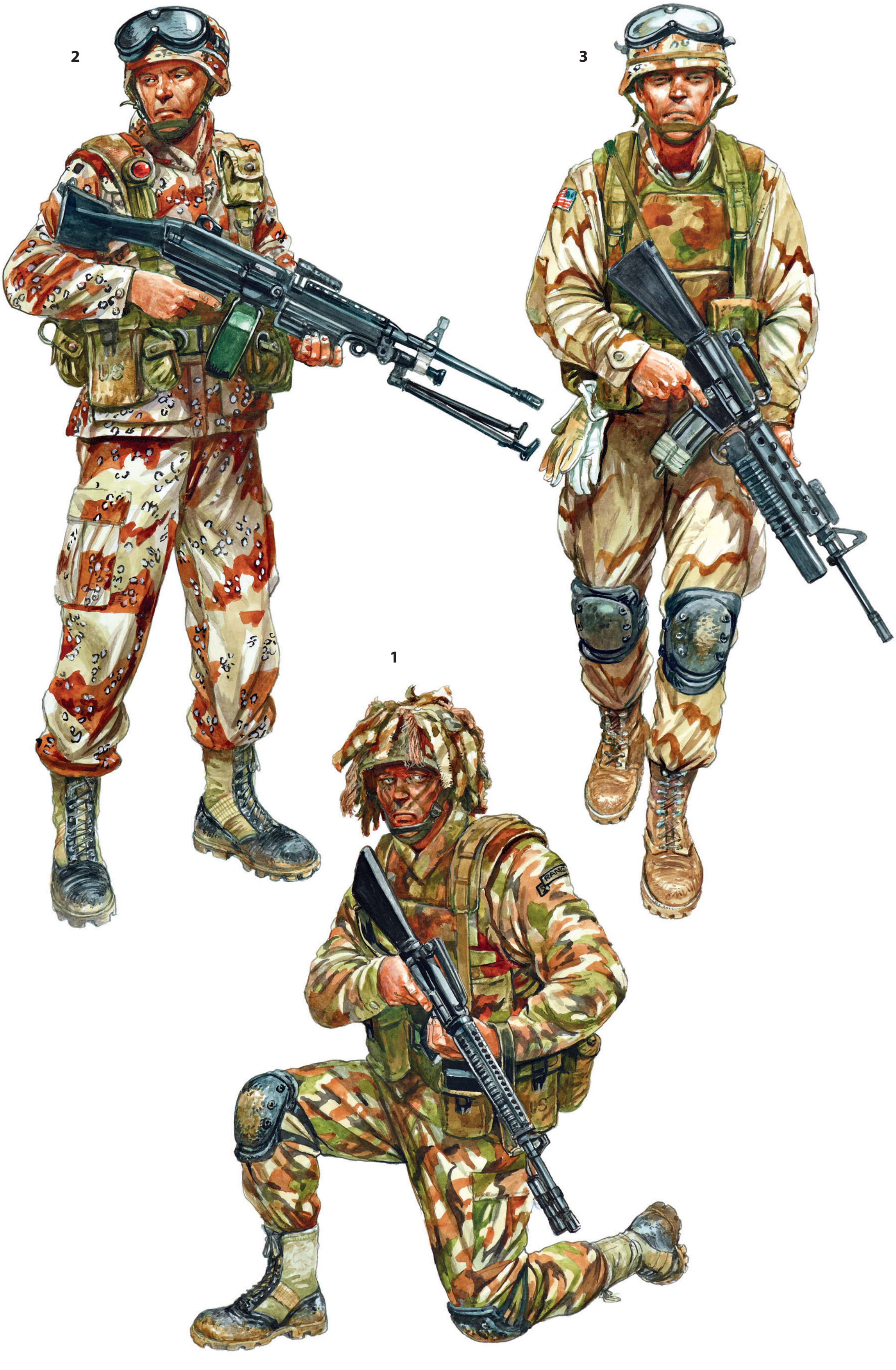
Wearing lightweight Woodland-pattern BDU (Battle Dress Utility), with similarly camouflaged Personnel Armor System Ground Troops (PASGT) body armor and helmet cover, this Ranger has affixed scrim made from cut-up strips of BDU material to his helmet as both camouflage and as an identification-friend-or-foe (IFF) aid – a common Ranger technique during the Panama operation. He has taped a Mini Maglite flashlight under the barrel of his 5.56x45mm M16A2 rifle to assist with low-light target identification. Note the jungle boots; the green All-purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment (ALICE)-pattern Load Bearing Equipment (LBE); black commercial knee pads; and the subdued black-on-green "2d Ranger Bn" scroll displayed at his left shoulder.

2: Operation "Desert Storm," Saudi Arabia, 1991

This Ranger M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) gunner wears the six-color "chocolate chip" desert-pattern DBDU with ALICE-pattern LBE and pouches. His body armor is the standard issue PASGT in the same pattern as the uniform. Note the dust goggles, variations of which were used in Operation "Desert Storm," Somalia, and early deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq; clear-lens protective glasses are now favored, as the goggles reduce peripheral vision by more than one-third. A red-filtered flashlight is hooked to his web gear. He too would display a subdued battalion scroll, as per figure A1.

3: Operation "Gothic Serpent," Somalia, 1993

The new Ranger Body Armor (RBA) can be seen here in Woodland pattern, worn over the then newly issued three-color Desert Camouflage Uniform (DCU); the helmet cover is still in the older "chocolate chip" pattern due to shortages. His desert boots are by Altberg. His M16A2 rifle has the 40mm M203 underslung grenade launcher fitted; note, too, the magazine pull-tab rigged from tape and paracord for rapid tactical reloading, which was later replaced with a commercial product from Magpul. Visible hitched at his hip are fast-rope gloves to protect his hands from friction burns during aerial insertion. A full-color US flag patch in reversed format is visible at his right shoulder.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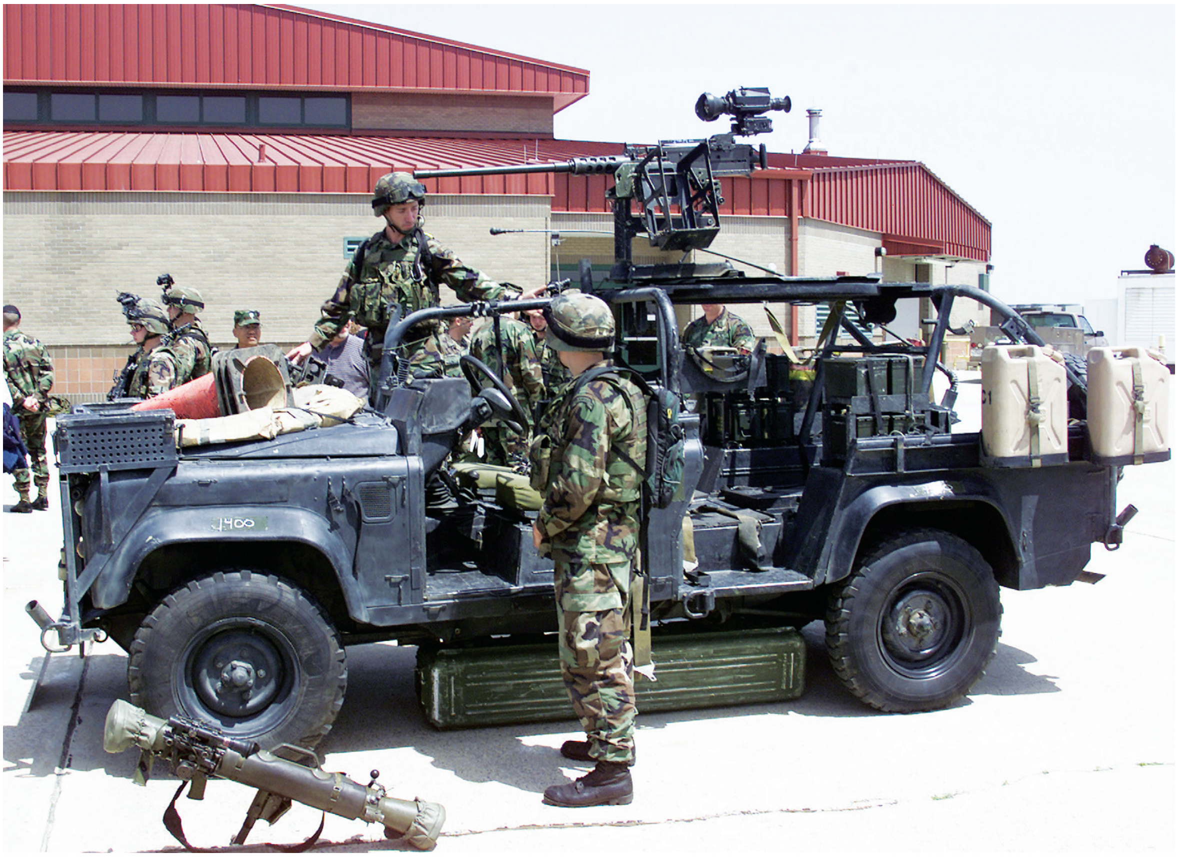

As part of Task Force Red-Tango in Panama, B Co, 1/75 used Ranger Special Operations Vehicles (RSOV). Seen here on display at the National War College in 2001 is an RSOV of that company, equipped with a .50cal M2HB-QCB heavy machine gun (compare with Plate F). The lack of operational stowage on the vehicle exposes the rows of .50cal ammo cans and fuel jerrycans carried as standard. An M3 Carl Gustav Ranger Antitank Weapons System (RAWS) recoilless rifle is displayed in the foreground. (Courtesy US Army; photo Michael Lemke)

accompanying Army Psy-Ops and USAF Special Tactics elements, along with AH-64A Apache and AH-6 Little Bird helicopter gunships known as Team Wolf. An Air Force AC-130 Spectre gunship orbited on overwatch high above. Romeo was tasked with securing the military airfield at Rio Hato to the east, defeating the two company-strength Panamanian military elements garrisoned there, and capturing the runways to establish an air bridge for follow-on forces.

Tango was built around 1/75 and C Co of 3/75, again supported by Psy-Ops and USAF Special Tactics teams, a flight of AH-6s from the 160th SOAR, and an AC-130. Tango's mission was to conduct a combat drop to seize the Tocumen/Torrijos International Airport in the west of the island from a company-strength element of Panamanian airborne troops. Although the Regiment had some local knowledge, since they had been practising the opposed seizure of the Panama Canal locks for some years, they would be hampered by significant intelligence deficiencies, and by having to operate among a teeming civilian population whose safety had to be protected at all costs.

Both operations saw the Rangers conducting night combat jumps from 500 feet (some 100 feet below the minimum safe height prescribed by the civilian Federal Aviation Administration), using older, non-steerable T-10 parachutes. This led to a large number of jump injuries ranging from sprained ankles to more severe fractures, which were only made worse by the estimated 100lb load each Ranger carried. (Subsequent adoption of the more advanced T-11 parachute has reduced serious drop zone injuries, including from landing directly on hard tarmac runways, to less than 1 percent.)

Task Force Red-Romeo

At Rio Hato, the Rangers jumped at 0103hrs local time on December 20, after USAF Special Tactics operators infiltrated by MH-6 Little Bird helicopters had placed beacons marking the landing zone. Just under two hours later the objective was secure enough for the arrival of the first follow-on forces. An F-117A Nighthawk air strike that was intended to demoralize the airfield's defenders apparently had the opposite effect, and the C-130 Hercules and C-141 Starlifter transport aircraft were engaged with small-arms and 14.5mm antiaircraft fire (11 of the 13 aircraft sustained damage, and at least one Ranger was hit while still in his aircraft). Unknown to the Rangers, the pair of 2,000lb bombs that the F-117As were assigned to deliver were dropped some 500 yards from the barracks areas in an attempt to minimize enemy casualties. At least one ZU-23-2 AA gun also fired upon the approaching transport aircraft, but was subsequently destroyed by the AC-130.

Once they had landed the Rangers formed up into platoon elements, with B Co assaulting the barracks under the protective fires of AH-6s low overhead. While A Co seized an NCO school without bloodshed, other C Co Rangers stormed a nearby beach house owned by Noriega (a mission originally detailed to the SEALs). The Rangers captured some of Noriega's security officers there after using an AT-4 rocket projectile to breach the front door. The opposition at Rio Hato had proven stronger than expected; the defenders also had the time to block the runway with parked vehicles, which slowed the delivery of the Rangers' vehicles. Despite this the Rangers inflicted disproportionate casualties upon the defenders (some 34 dead and an unknown number of wounded), compared to four Ranger KIA (two from friendly fire) and 27 wounded, including a number who may have been hit by fire from a supporting helicopter gunship. There were also 30 injuries recorded from the jump itself. Several Panamanian armored vehicles were destroyed by the supporting AC-130, while Ranger blocking elements engaged a number of Panamanian paramilitaries dressed in civilian clothes on the adjoining Pan-American Highway.

Task Force Red-Tango

The operation to seize the Tocumen/Torrijos International Airport (Omar Torrijos is the civilian international airport, while Tocumen is an adjoining Panamanian Air Force facility) saw the Rangers of Tango jump at 0110hrs, and run into less resistance than Romeo. A Company, 1/75 was assigned to Tocumen, where squads destroyed numerous parked aircraft. C Company were tasked with defeating the resident Panamanian infantry company defending the airfield, but thankfully most surrendered. B Company, equipped with Ranger Special Operations Vehicles (RSOV) and dirt bikes, secured the outer perimeter of the airfield. Opposition was comparatively light following preliminary fires from the AC-130, AH-64As, and AH-6s, although some shooting occurred in the main terminal building. The target was soon secured for the loss of one Ranger KIA (a medic from 1/75), five wounded, and just under 20 jump-related injuries sustained. On December 22, 3/75 also conducted a third airfield seizure at David Airfield; this time inserted by MH-47 Chinook helicopters rather than by parachute, they completed the operation without casualties or shots fired.

According to historian Greg Walker the Regiment was originally tasked with another initial mission, the capture or denial of Noriega's personal jet at Paitilla airfield, Panama City. Largely due to inter-service rivalry the mission was handed to the SEALs of Task Force White, who proceeded to lose four dead and eight wounded when they were caught in crossfire on the main runway and pinned down, until A Co, 2/75 were deployed to relieve them.

Before sunrise, Rangers from A Co, 2/75 conduct a fast-rope insertion from an MH-47 Chinook of the 160th SOAR during training at Yakima, Washington State; note the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor VTOL aircraft in the background. In February 1991 the first Rangers into Iraq were a squad providing local security for an MH-47 that flew in to establish a Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) for AH-6 gunships deployed on Operation "Ranger Run 1." (Courtesy US Army; photo Sgt Mikki Sprenkle)

Follow-on missions

Individual companies carried out a number of follow-on missions, with 2d and 3d Bns remaining in Panama until January 9–10, 1990. The Rangers were tasked with raiding a number of Noriega's mansions in the hunt for the dictator. In fact, Noriega was almost apprehended by the Rangers on the opening night of the operation near Tocumen, where he had been visiting a prostitute when the Rangers began their parachute assault. Air Force Special Tactics veteran Col John T. Carney Jr relates that "a Ranger roadblock team encountered a two-car convoy trying to escape the airfield. The Rangers stopped the first car but missed the second one. Later the Ranger regimental commander found out that Manuel Noriega had been in the second vehicle." C Company 3/75 conducted clearance operations in and around La Comandancia, the Panamanian Defense Force main headquarters. The Rangers also carried out a number of operations in support of Delta Force, which involved squads fast-roping in to secure a perimeter around a target location. The Rangers would typically deploy at all four corners of a site and establish blocking positions; their job was to stop enemy reinforcements, or curious civilians, from getting too close, and to watch out for "squirters" – enemy personnel who might escape the assaulters. (This operational template was one that the Rangers conducted many times with Delta, most famously three years later in Somalia.) In Panama the first mission with Delta was a raid on Penonome Prison, where A Co, 3/75 were tasked with establishing blocking positions while the Delta operators conducted a prisoner rescue. The ambitious plan called for 160th SOAR doorgunners to use their miniguns to engage a number of guard towers; once these were silenced, the Rangers would fast-rope from MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and cover Delta's entry and extraction from the prison. As the helicopters approached their target, however, it was discovered that the prison had apparently been abandoned. Instead of fast-roping the troops landed in the MH-60s, and Delta confirmed that the prison was indeed empty. Another Ranger/Delta mission to release political prisoners from a prison on Isla de Coiba also ended in a "dry hole."

Noriega eventually surrendered on January 4, 1990 after taking refuge in the Papal Nunciatura, and was handed over to the Drug Enforcement Administration. All of the Rangers' assigned missions were successful; they captured over 1,000 prisoners, but lost five Rangers killed and suffered 42 wounded.

OPERATION "DESERT STORM"

Arabian Gulf, 1991

Many readers may be unaware that the Regiment was even deployed in support of Operation "Desert Storm." Given Gen Norman Schwarzkopf's widely reported distaste for special operations forces (SOF), the Rangers struggled to be assigned a role within the wider war effort. However, elements of 1/75 had been deployed several times in preparation for hostilities during Operation "Desert Shield," the initial precautionary defense of Saudi Arabia. One such deployment included a mission to support Delta and the British SAS in a proposed Coalition hostage-rescue mission to recover civilian "human shields" held by Saddam Hussein's regime, but thankfully this extremely unpromising plan was aborted.

A Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) composed of a JSOC command element, a Delta squadron, and B Co, 1/75 Rangers along with accompanying 160th SOAR support was later deployed to the Gulf theater under Operation "Elusive Concept"; Gen Schwarzkopf himself capped the Ranger contingent at 150 men, and only agreed to their presence after it was argued that an Iraqi airfield might need to be seized. The JSOTF and its Ranger component were based at a disused commercial airfield at Arar in Saudi Arabia (a site that the Rangers would employ again 12 years later in Operation "Iraqi Freedom"). After operating as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for Delta – who had managed to carve out a role hunting SCUD missile launchers in the western Iraqi desert alongside the SAS – the Rangers were finally assigned a mission of their own, and one that fell squarely within their tradition of raiding expertise.

Operation "Ranger Run 1" was conducted on February 26, 1991 by B Co and elements of A Co, 1/75, with the objective of destroying a microwave relay tower and associated communications facility near the Jordanian border. The British SAS and Special Boat Service (SBS) had already had some success targeting communications and logistics facilities supporting the SCUDs, and it was felt that the Ranger target could have an impact on the command and control of these Iraqi ballistic missiles, whose use against Israel threatened to weaken the Western-Arab Coalition. The Rangers were split into a fire support element of some 15 men equipped with M60 medium machine guns, M249 Squad Automatic Weapons (SAW), and M3 Carl Gustav RAWS; a security and blocking element; and a headquarters team, all in a pair of MH-60L Black Hawks flown by the 160th SOAR. The main assault party, a 42-man reinforced rifle platoon, embarked in a USAF MH-53J Pave Low helicopter, and four AH-6G Little Birds would provide aerial close support.

The first actual Rangers from the mission to enter Iraq were a squad assigned to provide local security for an MH-47 that flew in a refueling bladder to establish a Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) for the short-range AH-6s. The communications site itself was defended by a number of nearby Iraqi S-60 antiaircraft guns, which were destroyed by an air strike by USAF F-15E Strike Eagles immediately prior to the arrival of the helicopters carrying the Rangers. The AH-6s conducted two minutes of preliminary fires upon the objective to suppress any opposition to the Rangers, firing their miniguns before following up with a pair of 2.75in unguided rockets fired into the main building. According to historian and retired US Army general Daniel Bolger, the MH-60Ls landed some 100 yards from the facility to establish a perimeter and overwatch position. The chain-link gate was blown in by an 84mm RAWS round; the main raiding party then landed and proceeded to clear the buildings and, under the expert tutelage of two attached Army Special Forces breachers, attached over 50 demolition charges to the structure. With the timers set, the Rangers climbed back aboard their helicopters and withdrew without loss; the raiding party had been on the ground for just 20 minutes. Ironically, however, although the charges detonated as designed, the main microwave tower did not actually collapse until several days after the ceasefire was declared.[2]

After the cessation of hostilities, 1/75 conducted one final mission along with the Regimental Headquarters Company. Under Operation "Iris Gold," they conducted a parachute drop into liberated Kuwait in December 1991 as a show of force to discourage any further Iraqi aggression.

OPERATION "GOTHIC SERPENT"

Somalia, 1993

Known within the Regiment as the "Battle of the Black Sea," the Rangers' next combat deployment is still perhaps their most famous, largely due to the book (and later film) *Black Hawk Down* which described the actions of B Co, 3/75 in October 1993.

The United States had become a key partner in a United Nations humanitarian mission in Somalia operating under the auspices of UNOSOM II (United Nations Operation in SOMalia) to alleviate mass famine in that war-ravaged country. Complicating the humanitarian mission in this failed state was the continuing conflict between rival warlords and criminal gangs, who stole aid supplies and targeted UN peacekeepers. Chief amongst these was Mohammed Farah Aidid of the powerful Habr Gedir clan, the leader of the militant Somali National Alliance (SNA). When SNA gunmen ambushed and killed 24 Pakistani peacekeepers the UN was forced to act. The Americans,

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[2] In fairness, it should be added that accounts of this raid have been contentious. Some commentators within the JSOTF have claimed that the site was a deserted radio tower that was in disrepair, and that it is questionable whether it was even inside Iraq.

B

SOMALIA 1993 & AFGHANISTAN 2001–2002

1: Operation "Gothic Serpent," Mogadishu, 1993

A member of the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) element that roped in to the "Super Six One" crash site, this Ranger wears over his three-color Desert Combat Uniform a black PT body armor vest provided by Delta Force as there were insufficient RBA vests available. His 5.56x45mm Colt 727 Carbine has been fitted with a sound suppressor, again supplied by Delta; some examples also mounted early Aimpoint optics. Note the Nomex flight gloves, Woodland-pattern knee pads, and an old DBDU "chocolate chip" helmet cover. All three figures on this plate wear Altberg desert boots.

1a: The "Ranger" tab denotes any soldier who has passed Ranger School, and is displayed at the top of the left sleeve whatever unit he is assigned to.

The "75 Ranger Rgt" scroll is worn by personnel of the regiment's HQ and non-battalion elements (not all of whom have passed Ranger School).

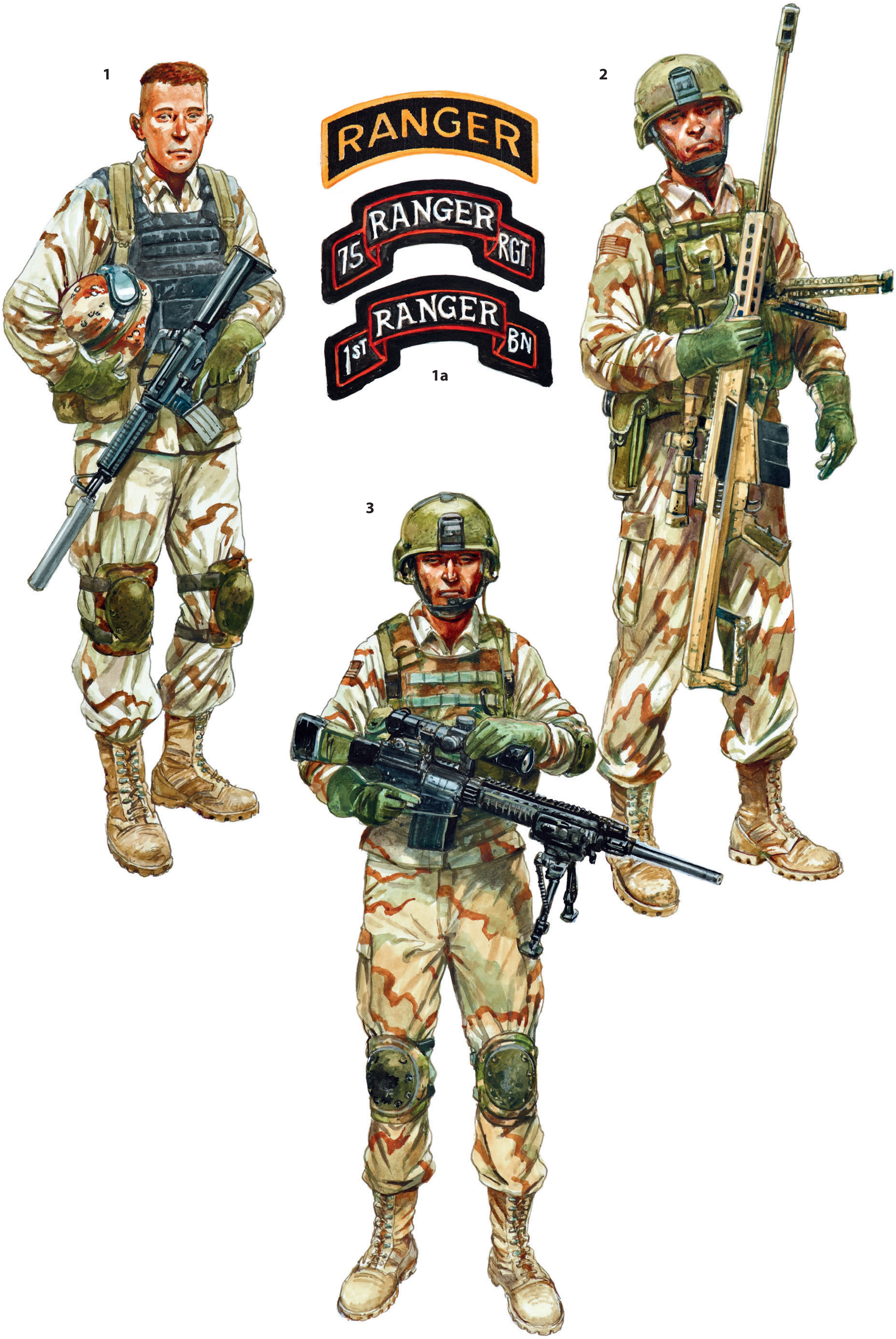
Soldiers assigned to the Regiment's rifle battalions wear their "Ranger" tab above the relevant scroll, "1st", "2d" or "3d Bn" respectively. Tab and scrolls are illustrated here in full colors; subdued versions, if any, are worn on combat uniforms.

2: Operation "Enduring Freedom," Afghanistan, 2001

This Ranger from the battalion sniper platoon is equipped with the .50cal Barrett M82A1 anti-matériel rifle, later type-classified as the M107 Special Application Scoped Rifle (SASR), with a Leupold scope. His helmet is the newly issued Modular Integrated Communications Helmet (MICH) TC-2000, designed to be both lighter than the older PASGT design and to fit over communications headsets; it also has a mounting plate for night-vision goggles. His equipment is the Ranger Assault Carrying Kit (RACK), a modular chest-rig style load-bearing equipment in Ranger green but fitted with Woodland-pattern pouches, and his sidearm is the standard issue 9x19mm M9 Beretta in a Bianchi M12 holster. He displays a subdued-color brown-and-tan US flag patch in reversed format at his right shoulder, as does figure B3.

3: Operation "Enduring Freedom," Afghanistan, 2002

This Ranger squad marksman carries the 7.62x51mm SR-25 which was being adopted at that time as the Mk 11 sniper rifle. The SR-25 and Mk 11 would prove popular due to the extended ranges encountered in Afghanistan, and served the Regiment for the majority of the conflict. This SR-25 has an AN/PEQ-2 laser illuminator attached to the nearside of the forearm, and a range card taped to the butt. His helmet is the MICH TC-2001, issued in this period in either tan or olive drab color since camouflage covers were not yet widely available; his RACK equipment is worn over the RBA armor vest, upon which the Special Operations Forces Personal Equipment Advanced Requirements (SPEAR) vest was modeled.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RANGER
RANGER
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RGT
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Mogadishu, Somalia, 1993: members of the famous B Co, 3/75 Rangers immediately prior to the "Battle of the Black Sea." Visible in the left and right background are MH-6 Little Bird helicopters with folded main rotor blades. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

as the largest force element in Operation "Restore Hope," passed the mission to JSOC, and a JSOTF was deployed as Task Force Ranger.

Task Force Ranger followed a similar pattern to Operation "Elusive Concept" in Saudi Arabia a couple of years previously. It included a command element, two platoons and a headquarters from B Co, 3/75 Rangers; Delta's C Sqn; a team of surveillance operators from Task Force Orange; and an aviation component from the 160th SOAR. A number of snipers were also attached from SEAL Team 6. Controversially, no AC-130s were assigned to the task force – although four had earlier been assigned to support the UN – and nor were any armored vehicles. If armor was required, Task Force Ranger would have to rely upon the Pakistani and Malaysian UN contingents.[3]

In an after-action review Lt Thomas Di Tomasso, the platoon leader of B Co's 2d Ptn, explained the role of the Ranger component of the task force: "The Rangers were to insert with, or just prior to, the assault elements, and isolate the objective. The objective was defined as the building complex or vehicle that a specific target (person) was in. Specifically, we would isolate it by preventing the crowds from influencing the assault, the targets from escaping the objective area, and any militia or armed civilians from reinforcing the objective area."

The Rangers were divided into 15-man helicopter "chalks" (derived from the World War II use of chalked numbers to show paratroopers which were their assigned aircraft) drawn from 1st and 2d Ptns who would establish blocking positions, with each chalk taking one corner of an objective, while 3d Ptn were mounted in ground vehicles to provide an extraction force for a strongpoint assault. The task force naturally preferred to operate at night, when both their technological and training advantages were maximized and the risk to their helicopters from AA and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire was reduced. However, Task Force Ranger's first operation ended in confusion. On August 30, 1993 intelligence indicated a former United Nations compound was being used by Aidid supporters. Delta conducted a nighttime helicopter

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[3] Three force package options of differing sizes – named Cadillac, Oldsmobile, and Volkswagen – were actually presented to the Secretary of Defense. One of these, Cadillac, included AC-130 Spectre gunship cover. None included attached armored vehicles of any kind (as had occurred briefly in Panama, and would again in Iraq a decade later).

Members of B Co, 3/75 Rangers pose for an official photo during Operation "Gothic Serpent" in Somalia, 1993. The Rangers at the rear of the image, wearing black PT body armor supplied to them by Delta, include members of the CSAR element that roped in from MH-60L Black Hawk "Super Six Eight" on October 3. Throughout the night they defended the crash site of MH-60L "Super Six One," the first of two Black Hawks shot down that day, against waves of Somali militia. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

assault that netted a number of UN personnel who were still based at the location, but no SNA militia. The international media had a field day with the story, ensuring that the presence of Task Force Ranger in Somalia became worldwide news.

Their second mission, on September 7, again involved a helicopter assault force striking in the hours of darkness. Delta detained a large number of suspects without a fight, though the ground convoy dispatched to pick up the prisoners received some small-arms and RPG fire. The third operation used a ground assault force in unarmored Humvees to detain an individual thought to be Aidid, but who turned out to be a pro-UN former police chief. Although this operation was launched in daylight due to the time sensitivity of the target, no shots were fired.

On September 17 the task force reverted to their normal nighttime operations, and struck a site near the infamous Bakara Market which housed a radio transmitter used by Aidid to transmit orders to his followers. This time the task force arrived in ground vehicles, with a pair of Black Hawks carrying Delta snipers providing overwatch from above. In daylight the following day Task Force Ranger went after Osman Ali Atto, a key Aidid adviser; his place of business, a garage, was raided by an assault force that arrived in Little Birds and Black Hawks, and a number of suspects were detained, but the raid missed Atto himself. Varying the template, the prisoners were extracted by helicopter while the assault force left via a ground convoy; again, they took small-arms and RPG fire.

The task force finally got their man on their sixth mission, launched on September 21. Actionable but time-sensitive intelligence sent them out in daylight once again, and a helicopter assault force attempted to stop a convoy of suspect vehicles by peppering their engine blocks with minigun fire. Their targets raced from the cars before the Rangers and Delta operators were in a position to capture them; the mission then switched to a strongpoint assault. Delta stormed a number of surrounding buildings, finally taking Atto into custody and loading their prisoners into the helicopters to be flown back to the UN base. The Rangers and Delta believed that if they struck with speed, aggression, and surprise they could exfiltrate from the target safely before the Somalis had a chance to organize a concerted resistance, even during daylight. Aidid was evidently beginning to feel the pinch: he was quoted as saying at

Although of poor quality, this is believed to be the only photograph taken during the Battle of the Black Sea on October 3. Just visible are both Rangers and Delta operators (to the right) maintaining security near the target building. (Courtesy US Army)

the time "those people [Task Force Ranger] are horrible and dangerous."

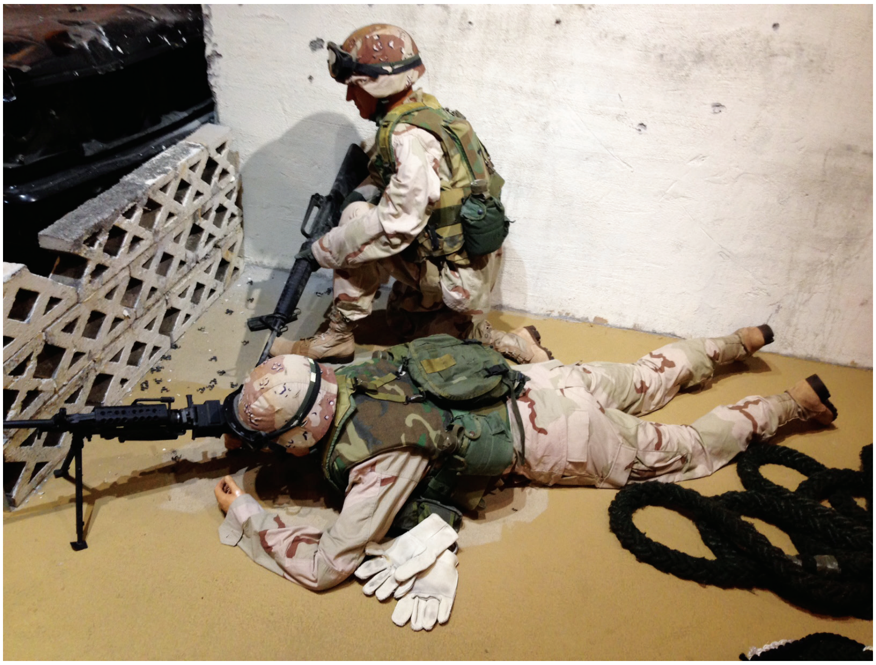
"The Battle of the Black Sea"

Task Force Ranger's seventh and final mission would be launched on the afternoon of Sunday October 3, 1993. It followed an established plan known as the "strongpoint assault template." As already described, the task force had also conducted operations following another template known as the "convoy assault," where suspect vehicles were stopped by AH-6 gunships while operators fast-roped to the ground and swarmed the targets. The task force had intentionally varied the operational templates to avoid tipping off Aidid's followers – in some cases using helicopters to extract the assault force, in others linking up with a vehicle column, or even deploying helicopters as a feint while a ground assault was mounted. On October 3, intelligence indicated that at least two key leadership targets would be attending a clan meeting in a three-story house one block away from the Olympic Hotel and a mile-and-a-quarter from the Bakara Market – an area that was described by the commander of US forces in Somalia as "Indian country." At 1542hrs local time, four MH-6s landed Delta assaulters around the perimeter of the target building, and the operation began.

While the operators cleared the building and captured their targets, Ranger chalks fast-roped from four MH-60Ls to establish blocking positions around the target building amid swirling dust clouds kicked up by the helicopters' rotor downwash. Two other MH-60Ls inserted additional assaulters right on the objective, before returning to orbit the area with Delta snipers providing aerial overwatch for the teams on the ground. A seventh MH-60L flew high above the battlespace, carrying the command element for Task Force Ranger. A final MH-60L orbited overhead carrying the CSAR team – made up of Rangers, Delta medics, and Air Force Special Tactics operators – that would become a vital part of the mission. Four AH-6s provided gunship support. If all went according to plan the ground assault force, in a dozen unarmored Humvees and M939 5-ton trucks, would arrive at the objective, load up the prisoners and the assault force, and head back to base. The mission was projected to last 30–40 minutes.

As most readers will know from the book and film, the Delta assaulters successfully secured their objective and captured their targets. The Rangers' 3d Ptn had also safely arrived with the ground convoy to transport everyone back to their base at Mogadishu Airport. As this was occurring, a young Ranger inexplicably missed the fast-rope and plunged some 40 feet to the ground. He was immediately declared a "litter urgent casualty," meaning that his injuries were serious enough to require priority evacuation. All of the Ranger chalks were receiving small-arms fire by this time, and smoke trails from RPGs crisscrossed the sky around the helicopters. A large mob of armed civilians and militia gunmen were approaching the objective from the north. "Super Six One," a Black Hawk carrying Delta sniper teams, was vectored in to try to drive the mob back with its rotor downwash, but as it approached it was struck by an RPG. "Super Six One" – nicknamed "Thunderstruck" by its crew – was down.

One of the Ranger chalks raced toward the crash site as the CSAR helicopter, "Super Six Eight," hovered overhead to fast-rope its team in to



Part of a static display at the US Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum commemorating Operation "Gothic Serpent"; these figures were dressed for the museum by Ranger veterans of the Battle of the Black Sea. This image gives a view of the rear of the RBA; during the fighting at the Haditha Dam, Iraq in April 2003, one Ranger's RBA rear trauma plate was hit four times without causing serious injury. Note the canteens worn to the side, the small assault pack, and, on the ground behind the figures, the fast rope. (Courtesy US Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum, Fayetteville, NC)

secure the downed Black Hawk, and an MH-6 made a courageous landing in the street to rescue two seriously wounded Delta snipers. Even as the CSAR element fast-roped in, another RPG struck the tail of "Super Six Eight"; the pilots managed to keep the aircraft level while the last man abseiled to the ground, before heading back to base trailing billowing smoke.

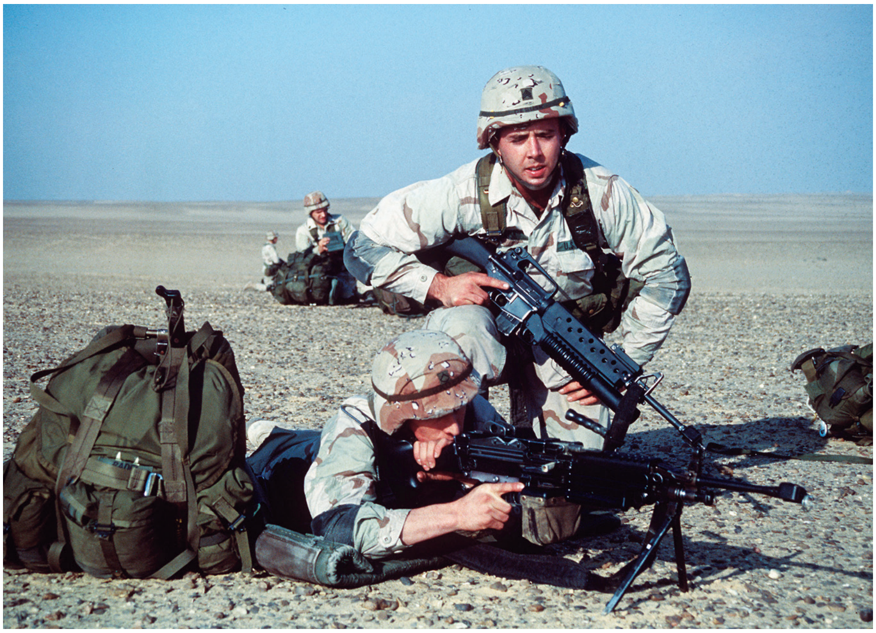
The CSAR team immediately began taking fire, and casualties, as the Rangers and Delta operators tried to establish a security perimeter around the downed "Super Six One," to allow the CSAR Para-Rescue Jumpers and medics to begin to try to stabilize the wounded. Both pilots were already dead, but the team recovered the two wounded crew chiefs and two other wounded Delta operators.

The vehicle-borne 3d Ptn, led in person by the battalion commander LtCol Danny McKnight, were now ordered to drive, still with their prisoners, to the Black Hawk crash site. (A convoy of three Humvees had left earlier with the injured Ranger who had fallen from the fast-rope.) McKnight's column ran into roadblocks and continual ambushes as they attempted to make their way to the crash site; one man was shot dead, as was a second Ranger with the three vehicles still heading for the airport. Progress was also hampered by the delay in receiving directions from an orbiting US Navy P-3 surveillance aircraft, which could only pass directions through the Ranger Joint Operations Center, not directly to McKnight – so by the time directions reached him his convoy had already passed the required turning. With three of his vehicles hit by RPGs and immobilized, increasingly low on ammunition, and with the majority of his Rangers wounded, some critically, the battalion CO made the difficult decision to return to the airport.

The second Black Hawk down

Barely 20 minutes after the first helicopter was shot down a second MH-60L, callsign "Super Six Four," was struck by an RPG and crash-landed about half a mile from the first crash site. With the only CSAR element already

Rangers wearing the new DCU uniform while deployed in Egypt during Operation "Bright Star '94," the year after the Mogadishu battle. Note the elbow pads, and olive drab rank tabs on the front of the "chocolate chip" covers still worn on the PASGT helmets. (Courtesy US Navy; photo PH2 Kenneth J. Riley)



committed, AH-6s flew repeated gun-runs to keep back the mobs that raced toward the downed helicopter. When it became evident that reaching the site with a ground rescue force would take some time, two Delta snipers were eventually given authorization to be inserted near it. The snipers managed to fight their way to "Super Six Four," dragged the four-man crew from the wreckage, and heroically defended the crash site until, having run out of ammunition and using recovered weapons and their pistols, both were shot and killed by the sea of Somali militia and incensed civilians. The injured Black Hawk pilot was spared a similar fate and, miraculously, would survive being captured alive.

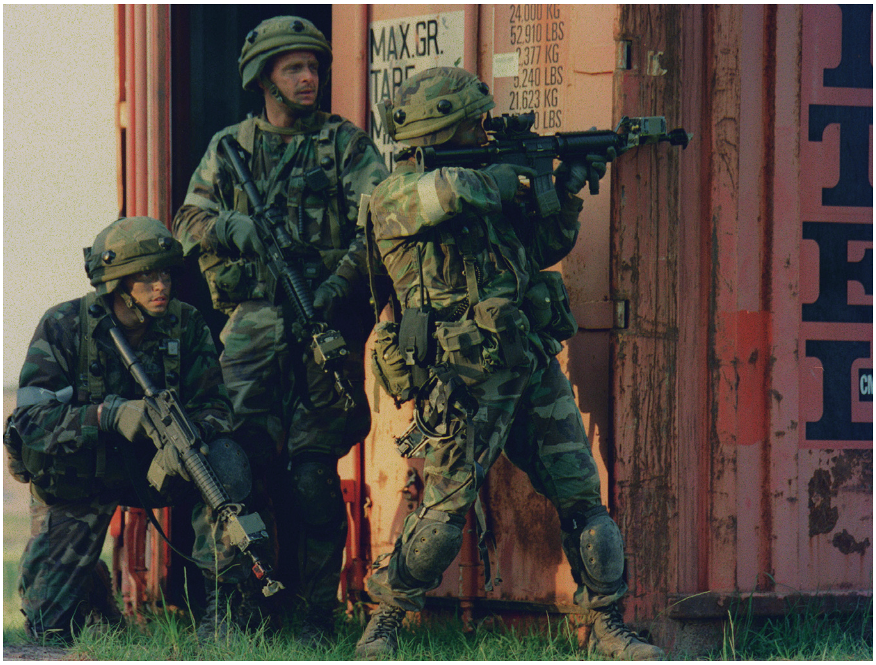
A contingent of Rangers from the airport, and a Quick Reaction Force drawn from the 10th Mountain Division, attempted independently to reach the second crash site, but both were driven back and retreated to the airport with more wounded. Instead, the 99 Rangers and Delta operators who had moved to the original "Super Six One" crash site defended it all night against encircling militias, while attempting to free the body of the pilot which was jammed in the wreckage. A combined UN and 10th Mtn Div relief column mounted in armored vehicles arrived just before 0200hrs the next morning, fighting their way to the first crash site and linking up with the men of TF Ranger. Soon afterwards the relief force managed to reach the second crash site, but, finding no bodies, they destroyed the helicopter with thermite grenades. The men of Task Force Ranger finally escaped the city a little after 0600hrs; some Rangers were forced to run what became known as the "Mogadishu Mile," as there was no space left in the vehicles.

A raid that had been predicted to last barely half an hour had descended into a 14-hour pitched battle resulting in six Rangers and five Delta operators dead (a sixth would tragically be killed two days later by a random mortar strike); five aviators from the 160th SOAR dead; and two soldiers from the 10th Mtn Div relief force dead. More than 80 US personnel, mainly Rangers, were wounded. The captured pilot of the downed "Super Six Four" was released after 11 days' captivity.

Aftermath

Their experiences in Mogadishu would give rise to significant changes in Ranger equipment and training. While Delta purchased the 6-wheeled Pandur Armored Ground Mobility System, the Rangers looked at a number of air-portable armored vehicles before, in 2005, they took delivery of a number of Stryker M1126 8-wheeled ICVs. Initially on temporary loan, these armored vehicles would transport them on their predominantly urban raiding missions in Iraq. The Rangers also soon adopted the more compact M4 carbine, better suited for urban combat, in preference to the longer M16A2 rifles they had carried in Somalia. Their experiences also fostered advances in new types of body armor, ballistic helmets, and medical technology. In terms of training, the Battle of the Black Sea led to a renewed focus on physical endurance, medical combat-lifesaver skills, and CQB shooting. This took place particularly under the leadership of Col Stanley McChrystal, who commanded the Regiment between 1997 and 1999 (and who would go on to be an important figure in its future deployments). In many ways, the grim experience of Operation "Gothic Serpent" shaped and prepared the Regiment for its coming fights in the "War on Terror."

Somalia was the last large-scale deployment for the Rangers in the 1990s. Under Operation "Amber Star," Rangers from Ranger Reconnaissance Detachment (RRD) Team 2 deployed in small numbers to Bosnia and Kosovo in support of both the US Army and US Navy special-mission units involved in the hunt for war criminals, often maintaining long-term covert observation posts to develop pattern-of-life intelligence on the targets. The use of the RRD in such operations was another glimpse into the future; the detachment, known informally as "Recce" within the Regiment, also deployed to Haiti in advance of a planned 1994 Ranger combat drop that was aborted at the last minute. The Regiment, alongside Delta and SEAL Team 6, also trained for a new role prompted by the breakup of the Soviet Union: seizing the nuclear missile facilities of rogue states – a mission they have thankfully never been



Taken in 1997 during an exercise in the United States using Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES) laser training gear, this photo illustrates (if rather dimly) a transition period for the Regiment in terms of weapons and equipment. It shows some Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG)-equipped M4 carbines, knee pads, and personal role radios, but still PASGT helmets and ALICE load-bearing equipment. (Courtesy US Army; photo Raymond A. Barnard) called upon to conduct. (Tragically, the commanding officers of both 1/75 and 3/75 were killed along with a number of other Rangers in a 1992 helicopter crash during one such counterproliferation exercise.)

OPERATION "ENDURING FREEDOM"

Afghanistan, 2001 to present day

The aftermath of the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 would see the Rangers deployed on nonstop combat operations for more than a decade in the global "War on Terror." Their first theater was Afghanistan, the haven for the al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the devastating attacks on 9/11. The Rangers again deployed as part of a JSOC task force, this time known as Task Force Sword. Following the covert insertion of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Army Special Forces teams, the Regiment was called upon to conduct an operation that remains controversial to this day: the seizure of a disused desert airstrip codenamed Objective Rhino, south of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.[4]

The nighttime combat drop, the Regiment's first since Panama, was made on October 19, 2001 when A and C Cos, 3/75 and command elements from both 3/75 and the Regimental HQ parachuted from 800ft – the increased height meant that this time the Rangers suffered only two jump-related injuries. The target, apparently the private airstrip of a hunting lodge owned by an Emirati prince, received a preliminary bombardment by both B-2A Spirit bombers and AC-130 gunships. It was swiftly captured by the Rangers with only one lone enemy shot and killed, although, according to US Special Operations Command's (SOCOM) history, a further 11 were killed in the preparatory air strikes. In a piece of Psy-Ops theater aimed at warning the

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[4] For a map of Afghanistan see Elite 163, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, page 5.

C

IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN, 2003–2007

1: Operation "Iraqi Freedom," 2003

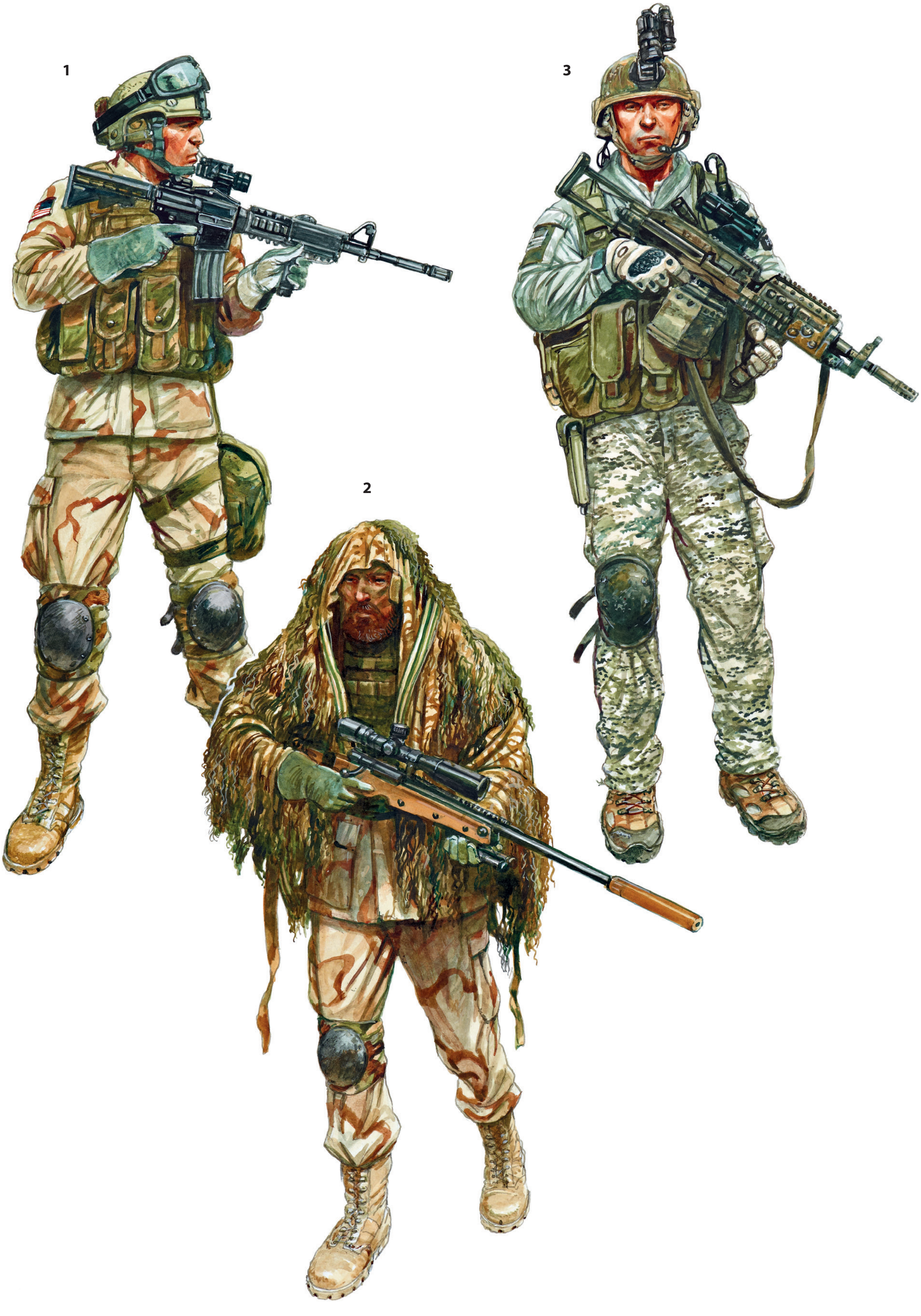
Depicted during the seizure of the Haditha Dam, this Ranger wears a trial version of a cutaway model of the MICH TC-2001 helmet that better accommodated the Sordin and Peltor radio headsets, here the Peltor Com-Tac II. Bolle goggles are worn on the helmet, and on the rear an MS2000 infrared strobe light is just visible. He wears three-color DCU, Nomex flight gloves, and RACK over RBA armor, both in Woodland pattern. The olive drab bag secured to his left leg carries his gas mask. His weapon is the 5.56x45mm SOPMOD Block 1 M4A1 carbine fitted with an M68 Aimpoint optic, which came into Ranger service in 1995; it also has an AN/PEQ-2 illuminator, and a vertical foregrip.

2: Operation "Enduring Freedom," Afghanistan, 2005

A sniper-qualified member of the Regiment's secretive Ranger Reconnaissance Detachment (RRD), illustrated wearing a half-length ghillie suit over his DCU and a Ranger-green Combat Integrated Releasable Armor System (CIRAS) Land plate carrier, with pouches attached at the sides only. His weapon is a suppressed Mk 13 sniper rifle in .300 Winchester Magnum, a caliber widely favored by Ranger snipers at the time. The RRD, since renamed the Ranger Reconnaissance Company (RRC), have their own selection course that is heavily influenced by Delta's course. Once he has passed this selection the candidate – who must already have passed Ranger School, Airborne School, and the Reconnaissance Surveillance Leaders Course – embarks upon on a further 29-week initial training package.

3: Operation "Iraqi Freedom," 2007

This Ranger machine-gunner assigned to Task Force North carries the 5.56x45mm Mk 46 light machine gun mounting a fabric feed bag, M68 optic, vertical foregrip, and weapon light. He wears a hooded gray-green Level 5 Protective Combat Uniform (PCU) cold weather jacket over the shirt of the standard issue but much maligned Army Combat Uniform (ACU) in digital pattern; hardly visible on his left upper sleeve is a blood-group "zap patch," for instance "AB12A" – for style see Plate D1a. His plate carrier is the CIRAS Land in Ranger green, worn under the Ranger Load Carrying System (RLCS). A number of different plate carriers replaced the RBA through the Force Modernisation program – the Oakley assault gloves are another result of that initiative. The night-vision device, here shown flipped up on his cutaway TC-2001 helmet, is the AN/PVS-14 monocular adopted in 2006. He wears Merrell Sawtooth hiking boots in place of the Altberg desert boots of the other two figures.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Eastern Afghanistan, late 2001: a Ranger aboard an early-model Ground Mobility Vehicle (GMV) mans a .50cal M2 heavy machine gun fitted with a day/night thermal sight, while Special Forces conduct a *shura* – a group discussion – with local elders. (Courtesy JZW)

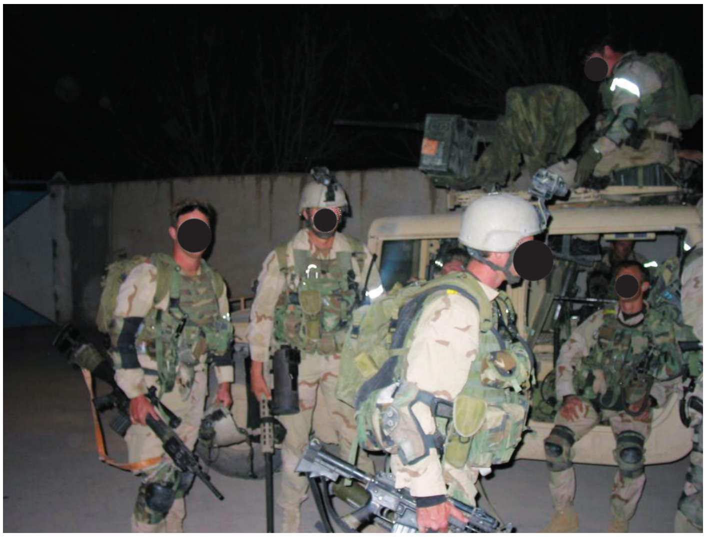
enemy that the United States military could strike at any time, anywhere in Afghanistan, the operation was filmed and segments released to the media. The inclusion of a combat camera crew on the mission meant that the Rangers lost an integral component of their standard airfield seizure package – a pair of AH-6 gunships that would be flown into the objective as soon as the runway was secured to provide intimate close air support for the Rangers.

The Rangers at Objective Rhino spread out to seize four separate objectives codenamed Tin, Iron, Copper, and Cobalt (similar names for objectives would be used during later Ranger operations in Iraq). Some 26 Rangers from B Co, 3/75 deployed to a secondary contingency FARP site within Pakistan named Objective Honda. As they arrived at that location, one of the MH-60K Black Hawks carrying the Rangers encountered a "brown-out" from the dust kicked up by the rotor wash and tipped over, killing two of the Rangers on board.

The Rhino and Honda missions enabled another, more covert operation that was not filmed: a Delta strike against Taliban leader Mullah Omar's compound, known as Objective Gecko. The Rangers of B Co, 3/75 provided blocking positions in what the Regiment described officially as a "special operations raid mission." AH-6 gunships flew from Rhino to support the strike on Gecko after a FARP was established, and within 20 minutes of the seizure of the airfield the Little Birds had arrived to refuel and rearm. In the event, Gecko, like Rhino, proved to be a "dry hole" largely devoid of enemy activity.

After 5 hours and 24 minutes on the ground, the Rangers and supporting elements from the 160th SOAR and Air Force Special Tactics collapsed their perimeters at Rhino and climbed aboard their MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft to disappear into the Afghan night. Critics argued that both operations presented significant and unnecessary risk to the Rangers and operators, particularly given the distances and the numbers of aircraft involved. Many of the participants still feel that the operations were essentially staged by the White House for political capital. Inexplicably, 3/75 were sent back to the United States in late November 2001 as part of an ill-conceived deception plan designed to fool the opposition into thinking American Special Operations Forces (SOF) had been withdrawn. They were later replaced by 1/75.

November 13, 2001 saw the Rangers of B Co, 3/75 conduct another combat drop to seize a remote desert airstrip, codenamed Objective Bastogne, to establish a FARP site for a strike force of AH-6s. Dropping from barely 500ft, the majority of the Rangers were injured during landings on rocky ground. The RRD also conducted a high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) parachute jump onto Objective Bastogne in preparation for the arrival of B Company. The RRD conducted further HALO and other freefall jumps, including one mission at Drop Zone Wrath to reconnoiter a dry lake bed in preparation for landing Delta's Pinzgauer trucks.



Eastern Afghanistan, late 2001: Rangers preparing for a night mission in support of a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). Note the desert-tan MICH TC-2000 helmets; glint tape around left upper sleeves; and SPEAR/BALCS armor and load-bearing equipment – the "Body Armor Load Carrying System," as introduced under the US Special Operations Command's (SOCOM) "Special Operations Forces Personal Equipment Advanced Requirements" program. The sniper pair to the left have an early Mk 11 or SR-25 sniper rifle, and a .50cal M82A1 Barrett rifle fitted with a bulky thermal optic. (Courtesy JZW)

Several days later a similar operation called "Relentless Strike" saw a reinforced Ranger platoon in GMVs secure a desert strip – Objective Anzio – to allow further AH-6 strike missions. The Rangers used the GMVs to conduct a mounted reconnaissance of a second nearby dry lake bed that was dubbed Bulge; the following day this too became a temporary base of operations for the helicopter gunships.

With the Taliban in full retreat and the US-supported Northern Alliance (supported by Army Special Forces) recapturing key cities, the Rangers assigned to Task Force Sword (now redesignated Task Force 11) were given the task of supporting the hunt for Taliban and al Qaeda high-value targets (HVT). They spent much of their time colocated with a rotational element of SEALs from Team 6 based at the JSOC compound on Bagram Air Force Base. From late 2001, small numbers of Rangers were also attached as security and force protection to Special Forces ODAs and Advance Force Operations elements.

December 2001 was frustrating for the Regiment. As CIA, Special Forces and Delta operators closed in on al Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden at Tora Bora in Afghanistan's eastern mountains south of Jalalabad, multiple requests were made by both the CIA and Delta for the deployment of a Ranger battalion to assist them. The idea was for the Rangers to act as the blocking force to seal the mountain passes into Pakistan, effectively shutting off bin Laden's escape routes. Disappointingly, these requests were denied amid political arguments about minimizing the US military "footprint," and, with the complicity of Afghan militias who were ostensibly working with the Americans, bin Laden slipped away.

2002: Takur Ghar

The Rangers were again largely sidelined during preparations for Operation "Anaconda," then the largest air assault operation since Vietnam. Planned for March 2002, this was intended to flush out Taliban and foreign fighter elements

A rare image of a Ranger in combat on Takur Ghar during the "Battle of Roberts Ridge," March 2002. This shows Ranger Anthony Miceli maintaining a security position to stop insurgents from approaching the flanks. He carries Ranger Aaron Totten-Lancaster's M249 SAW, since his own had been disabled by a bullet-strike during the initial firefight on the peak. (Courtesy US Army)

that had retreated to the Lower Shahikot Valley south of Gardez in Paktia Province in eastern Afghanistan. The air assault would be conducted by Task Force Rakkasan, comprising infantry units from the 10th Mtn and 101st Abn Divs, while US and Coalition special operations forces maintained covert observation posts in the surrounding mountains to guide in close air support. Although several elements from Task Force 11 were involved in the mission, the Rangers were not – apart from 1st Ptn, A Co, 1/75, who were then assigned as the rotational QRF for Task Force 11 at Bagram.

Operation "Anaconda" did not go according to plan. During the attempted infiltration of a SEAL Team 6 recon team onto a mountain known as Takur Ghar, their MH-47E Chinook was taken under heavy machine gun fire, and a SEAL fell from the open cargo door as the pilot took evasive action. Landing on the snow-covered peak of Takur Ghar, the Red Squadron SEAL fought a lonely battle against the foreign fighters who quickly surrounded him. He was wounded, and after losing consciousness from blood loss he was eventually executed by the enemy. During the confusion, the SEAL recon team was reinserted onto the peak in a desperate rescue attempt, plunging them into a vicious firefight. At the same time, the Ranger QRF were alerted and took to the air, headed for the same mountain. Incredibly, in the fog of war, one half of the QRF aboard MH-47E "Razor Zero One" touched down on the very same exposed landing zone. The Chinook was immediately struck with small-arms, heavy MG, and RPG fire; one Ranger was killed in the initial fusilade as the helicopter crash-landed, and two more died as they raced down the ramp. The Rangers bravely attempted an immediate assault on the enemy positions, but withdrew to their scarce cover when they ran into concealed insurgent bunkers.

Chinook "Razor Zero Two" managed to orbit around the mountain, finally depositing the second chalk of Rangers at an offset landing zone some 2,000ft below the peak of Takur Ghar where their comrades were embattled. These Rangers began a long and arduous climb, while the pinned-down Rangers on the peak called in multiple Danger Close air strikes on the enemy positions. These included the first recorded use of an MQ-1 Predator unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) as a close air support platform; the first Hellfire missile fired from the drone missed, but a second hit its target, collapsing an enemy bunker.

After an exhausting two-hour climb under intermittent mortar fire, the second Ranger chalk made the summit and reinforced those from "Razor Zero One." Under the exceptional leadership of Ranger Lt Nate Self, the combined force launched a textbook assault against the remaining insurgent positions. After a final Danger Close air strike to suppress the defenders, and under the supporting fire of two M240B medium machine guns, seven Rangers stormed the peak and cleared the enemy bunkers and fighting positions with grenades and automatic-weapons fire. The Rangers and Air Force operators, along with the 160th SOAR aircrew, worked to consolidate their position; under fire and

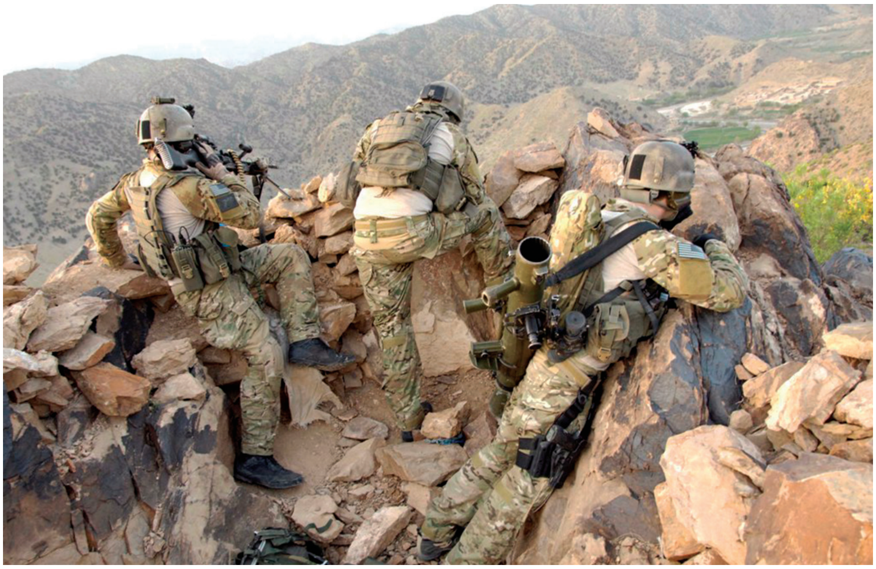
Rangers of 1st Ptn, B Co, 2/75 in eastern Afghanistan in late 2003, wearing DCU battledress. From November 2003 to January 2004, the small resident Ranger and SEAL elements participated in Operation "Winter Strike" in Nuristan and Kunar provinces. Carried out during one of the worst Afghan winters on record, this saw the Rangers patrolling widely through the mountainous region, with some patrols lasting more than a month. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

in knee-deep snow, they moved their wounded into the shelter of the recently vacated enemy positions. During this part of the operation an Air Force Para-Rescue Jumper was mortally wounded as the Rangers awaited nightfall and eventual helicopter evacuation. Takur Ghar (or the "Battle of Roberts Ridge" as it became known, after the name of the SEAL who was killed), eventually claimed seven American lives: the SEAL, three Rangers, one air crewman, and two USAF Special Tactics operators.

2003–2005: minimal presence

Over the following years the Rangers maintained a platoon at Bagram along with a troop from SEAL Team 6, three MH-47Es, and a pair of armed Predator UAVs. Known as an Expeditionary Force, this was the only JSOC presence in-country. With few high-value target missions, the Rangers conducted counterinsurgency patrolling in an effort to develop local intelligence networks. Occasionally they would launch missions targeting al Qaeda and associated jihadist groups. In February 2003, for example, the Rangers of C Co, 2/75, reinforced with A Co elements and alongside the SEALs, launched a large-scale operation in Nimruz Province against foreign fighters entering from Pakistan. By winter 2003/04 the Rangers and SEAL Team 6 had been given rotational command of the Afghan theater, with either a US Navy or Ranger headquarters element taking command of all JSOTF assets.

In April 2004 the Rangers of 2/75 suffered the controversial loss of Cpl Pat Tillman during an insurgent ambush in Khost Province. Since Tillman



2010: While an assault element advances toward a suspect compound in Paktia Province, a Ranger blocking position provides overwatch; this image demonstrates the effectiveness of the MultiCam camouflage uniform in rocky terrain. Note the M240B medium machine gun on the left, and on the right the fire-support Ranger with a slung M3 Carl Gustav RAWS. Famously nicknamed "the Goose" by the Regiment, the M3 has a variety of advanced ammunition available, including timed airburst and flechette rounds, and was rightly feared by the Taliban. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Spc Matthew Fitzgerald)

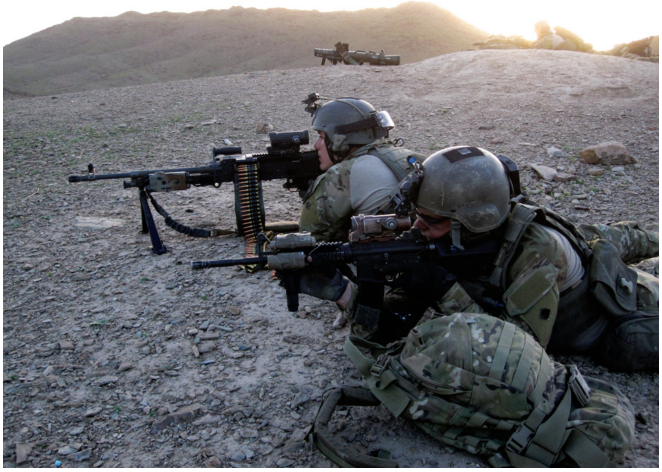
was a former National Football League star who had joined the Rangers after 9/11 this attracted media attention, which redoubled when it was belatedly admitted that he had been killed by friendly fire.

A year later the Rangers' target set in Afghanistan, formerly restricted to al Qaeda, was finally expanded to include the Taliban, and the Regiment now began to hunt insurgent leaders, bomb-makers, and facilitators throughout the country. In June 2005 they also rescued Navy SEAL combat medic Marcus Luttrell and recovered the remains of his three fallen comrades after his SEAL recon team was ambushed during Operation "Red Wings" (as depicted in the book and later film *Lone Survivor*).

2006–2008: increasing tempo

By 2006 the Afghan insurgency was growing as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) attempted to expand security into the restive south. The Rangers launched Operation "Niland II" in Kandahar, using a Predator UAV to track a large concentration of Taliban fighters threatening the city. After the insurgents entered a valley a Ranger platoon established blocking positions at one end while a SEAL Team 6 troop acted as "beaters," sweeping through the valley from the other end; a reported 120 enemy were killed, with zero casualties to the Rangers and SEALs. Due to the increasing operational tempo, and what was known officially as a "lowered targeting threshold" (meaning that lower-level insurgents could be targeted), the Rangers in Afghanistan were reinforced that year with a second platoon.

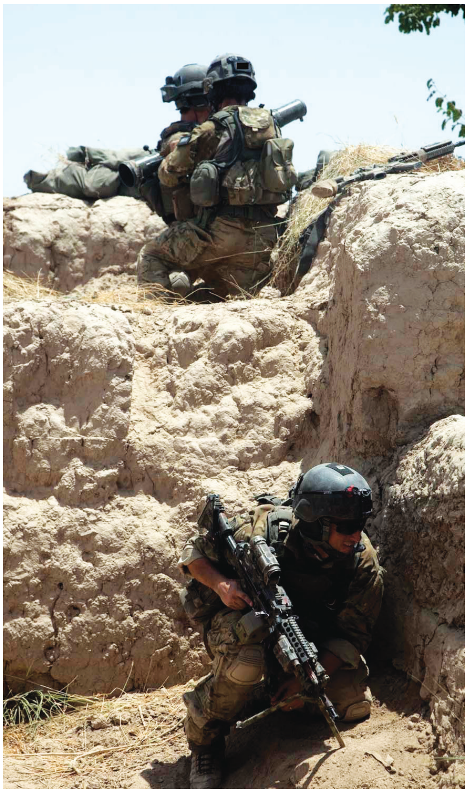
A similar operation into the Sangin Valley in Helmand Province saw 1st Ptn, B Co, 1/75 surrounded by an estimated 300 insurgents, requiring multiple Danger



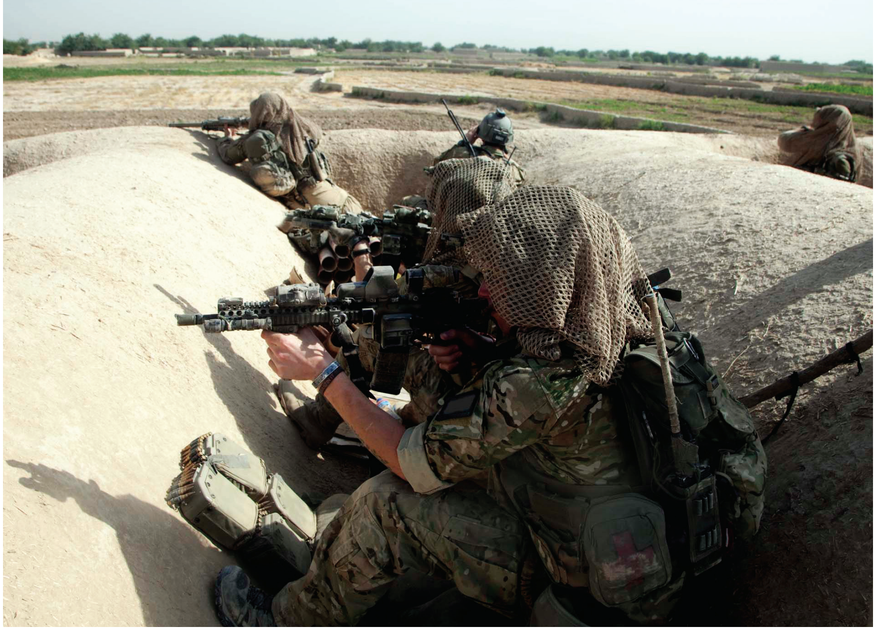
March 2010: the early morning sun in Farah Province reaches a Ranger overwatch position. This M240 medium machine gun mounts an older Elcan M145 optic. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Spc Daniel Petty)

Close air strikes to hold them back. As the Rangers were extracted an MH-47 was shot down, crash-landing in a nearby poppy field. A battalion sniper team, two battalion recon teams, and an anti-armor team held back the Taliban while orbiting MH-47s added their miniguns to the cordon of fire, and an AC-130 that was brought on station ran through all its ammunition – twice. Finally, the remaining Rangers were extracted, and the downed MH-47 was "denied from the air" by the 105mm M102 howitzer of the AC-130.

Also in 2006, a team from the RRD working directly for JSOC conducted an operation to target the leader of the Haqqani insurgent network in eastern Afghanistan. The team of four, with an attached JTAC and an Australian commando on an exchange posting, infiltrated into the mountains and established an observation post at an altitude above 10,000ft to watch an enemy base camp around a cave network. The team later vectored in a B-1B Lancer bomber which rained 2,000lb Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) onto the target; although over 100 enemy were estimated killed, Haqqani himself was not among them.



Kandahar Province, June 2010: in a "Named Area of Interest," Rangers from Team Merrill prepare for imminent contact with the Taliban, during a period when the rotating Ranger company in Afghanistan saw repeated and intense firefights. Note the massive construction of the typical Afghan compound wall. The two-man team at the top have an M3 Carl Gustav RAWS, and the Ranger at lower right carries a Mk 46 light machine gun. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Christian Palermo)



Kandahar Province, June 2010: another Team Merrill element on overwatch, with a sniper team visible in the background. In the foreground note the SAW ammunition drums, suggesting preparations for heavy contact; the "KIA bracelet" worn by the Ranger, commemorating the name of a soldier killed in action; and the camouflage nets used both to break up the shape of the head and to give a little shelter from the blistering Afghan sun. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Christian Palermo)

It was in Afghanistan that the Regiment's first Medal of Honor of modern times was awarded, to Sgt 1st Class Leroy Petry of D Co, 2/75. Under fire in Paktia Province on May 26, 2008, Petry was wounded in both legs. He continued to fight, but when he attempted to throw back an enemy grenade to save his comrades it detonated, destroying Petry's right hand. He applied his own tourniquet while still being engaged by insurgents, and directed the return fire of his fellow Rangers until he could be extracted safely.

2009–2011; Afghan Surge & Team Merrill

By 2009, Gen McChrystal had placed the Rangers in sole command of JSOTF operations in Afghanistan. The so-called Afghan Surge was in full swing, and this brought JSOC units into the theater. While the SEALs took the east and Delta took the north, a full Ranger battalion was based in Kandahar as Task Force South, and Rangers also manned Task Force Central in Khost. The Ranger task forces used their Stryker and MRAP vehicles on occasion, but the majority of their operations were conducted by helicopter, due both to the distances involved and the ever-present threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

According to a brutally frank JSOC briefing, the task forces' mission was to "conduct offensive operations in Afghanistan to degrade TBL [Taliban leadership], AQL [al Qaeda leadership], HQNL [Haqqani leadership] and their networks, in order to enable Coalition and Afghan forces to expand designated security zones." These offensive operations "buy time and space for... conventional regional commanders to accomplish the COIN [counterinsurgency] task… We are not encumbered with those COIN tasks; we don't run any *shuras*, or anything like that; we are focused on manhunting."

D OPERATION "ENDURING FREEDOM," AFGHANISTAN, 2009–2013

1: Designated marksman, 2009

This illustrates the Crye Precision MultiCam-pattern combat uniform, complete with integral knee pads, that was adopted by the Rangers in 2009 (the ACU remained in use for wear in barracks). The Eagle plate carrier has RLCS pouches in Ranger green, worn open to facilitate faster reloading; the antenna of an AN/PRC-148 radio rises from a pouch at rear right. Hiking boots like these Merrell Sawtooths have largely replaced heavier combat boots for most missions. Just visible under his MICH TC-2001 helmet are the Peltor radio headset, and the Wiley X eye protection glasses that are now standard issue. As a designated marksman he is armed with the newly issued 7.62x51mm Mk 17 Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle (SCAR), with Elcan Specter DR optic, LA-5 infrared illuminator, and a Scout weapon light on the right side of the forearm; he has also taped a Garmin GPS to the buttstock. His secondary weapon is a 9x19mm Glock 17 pistol in a SERPA hip holster.

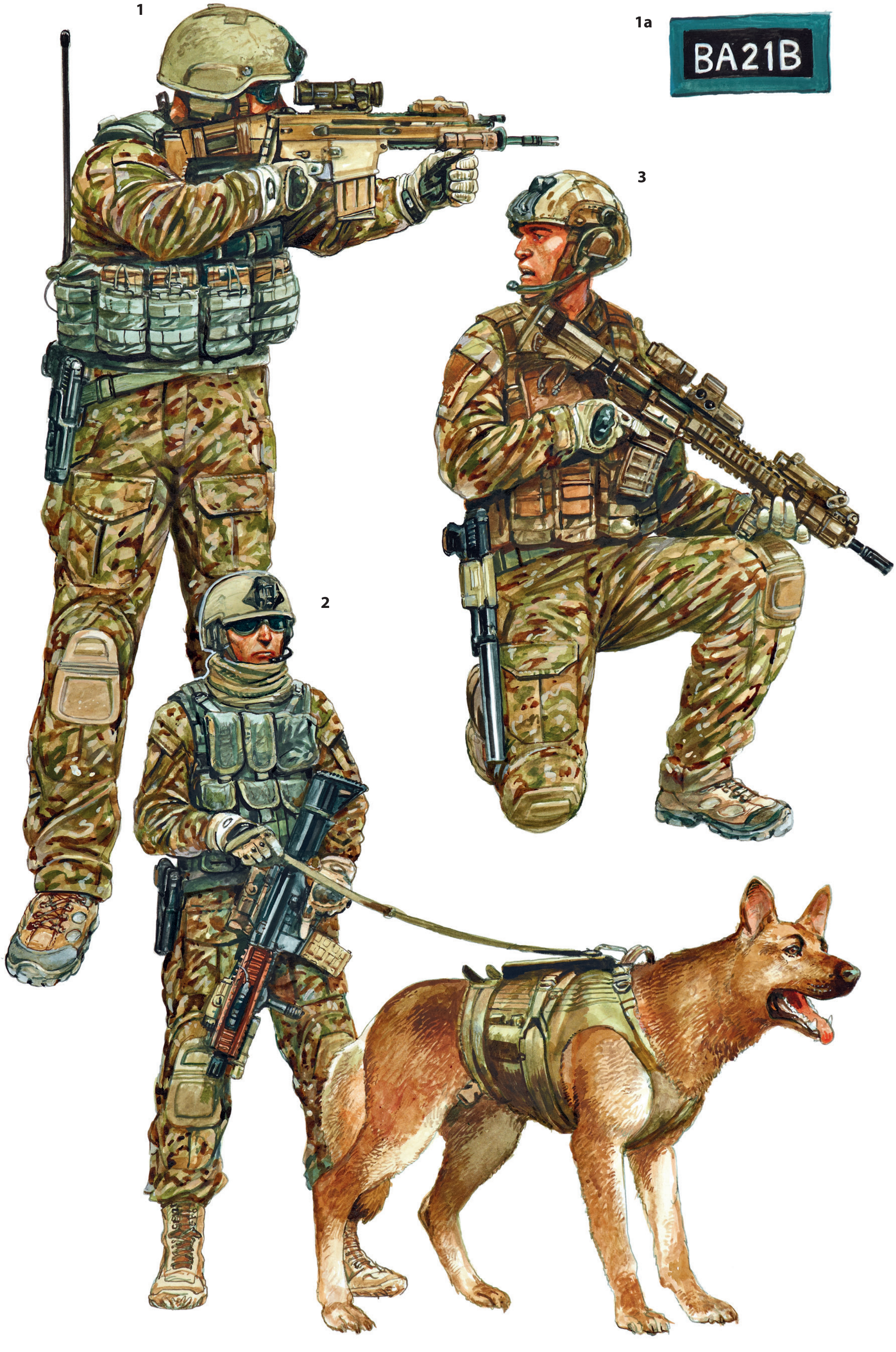
1a: Typical "zap patch" as worn on the left upper sleeve, and usually repeated on the chest of the plate carrier.

2: Dog-handler, 2011

The Rangers have employed dogs (officially known as "Multi-Purpose Canines," MPC) for most of the "War on Terror." The Ranger MPC program began in earnest in 2007; prior to this, dogs and handlers were attached from a civilian contracting firm. The first Regiment MPC training school saw four handlers qualified; by 2009 there were 12, and eventually there were enough MPCs and handlers for each deployed platoon. The Rangers use both Belgian Malinois and Dutch Shepherds, which are trained to detect explosives and assist in detaining insurgents; the harness includes a mount for a camera. Along with the tactical advantages, the presence of the dogs has a definite mental health benefit for many of the young Rangers. This handler carries a 5.56x45mm SOPMOD Block 2 M4A1 with 10in barrel, Specter DR optic, LA-5 infrared illuminator, and Surefire light, and also a 9x19mm Glock pistol. His helmet is the MICH TC-2002, his vest the now-standard Eagle plate carrier with RLCS pouches.

3: Assaulter, 2013

This Ranger wears the Crye MultiCam-pattern uniform; the newly issued Ops-Core FAST helmet, which features side rails to attach lights or cameras, with a MultiCam cover and MSA Sordin headset; and an Eagle plate carrier with MultiCam pouches. His rifle, hand-painted with camouflage, is the 5.56x45mm SOPMOD Block 2 M4A1 with full-length Picatinny rails, EOTech close-quarter battle (CQB) sight with swing-away magnifier for use at longer ranges, LA-5 infrared illuminator, Scout weapon light, Magpul PMAG polymer magazine, and vertical forward grip. Note the unusual sidearm, a suppressed 9x19mm Glock 17 pistol in a Crye Gunclip holster; this special-purpose weapon is used for covert night raids and by the RRC. He probably carries seven extra magazines for the M4A1, two "flashbang" grenades, two fragmentation grenades, a chemical smoke grenade, and a couple of spare magazines for the pistol.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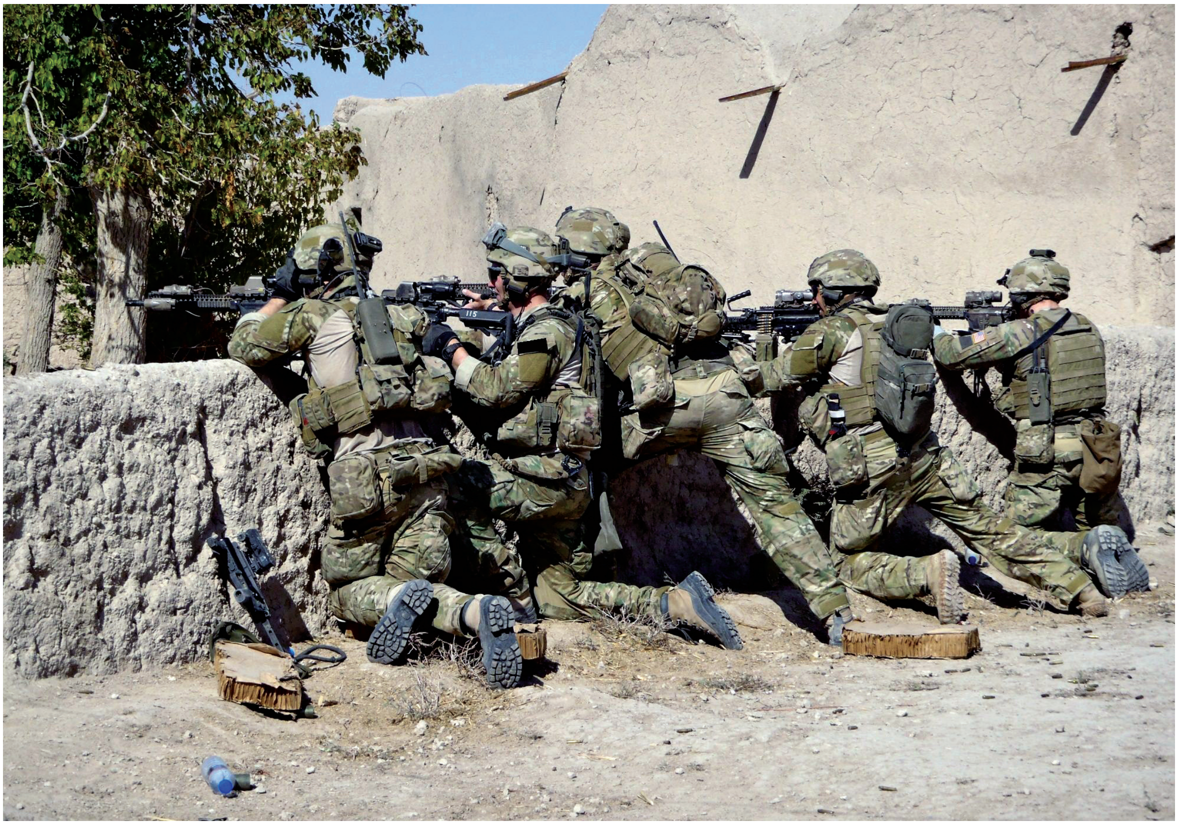


During a firefight in Kandahar Province in 2010, a Ranger blocking position responds to insurgent fire; the Rangers' Block 2 carbines mount EOTech optics with swing-away magnifiers. Note, leaning against the wall on the left, the replacement for the M203A1 underslung grenade launcher: the M320 side-opening launcher, here in standalone format. (Courtesy Dept of Defense)

While the Rangers tried to use techniques similar to those perfected in Iraq (see next chapter) to map Taliban networks through their use of cell phones, the Afghan insurgents were surprisingly adept at communications security. Overhead imagery from recon aircraft and long-loiter drones (known as ISR, Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance) became the primary means of tracking targets in Afghanistan.

With the JSOC surge and the transfer of the theater headquarters to the Rangers, Regimental leadership pushed their teams to match the kind of tempo seen at the height of operations in Iraq. Predictably, this had two results: more "dry holes," and a further lowering of the targeting threshold, as Rangers went after local insurgents in an effort to assist the regular ground-holding US Marine Corps and US Army units. At the same time the Rangers continued to target insurgent HVTs on the task forces' Joint Target List-Afghanistan.

In late August 2009, A Co, 1/75 and elements from 3/75 were involved in a massive contact with up to 400 Uzbek and foreign fighters when the Rangers assaulted an insurgent training camp in the mountains of eastern Paktia. The insurgents were well sited in prepared fighting positions that had resisted preparatory air strikes. The battle eventually involved HIMARS fire from Bagram and close air support from F-15Es, A-10As, and even B-1Bs. Two Rangers were killed in action and a number injured, including a dog-handler who was wounded by a suicide-bomber.

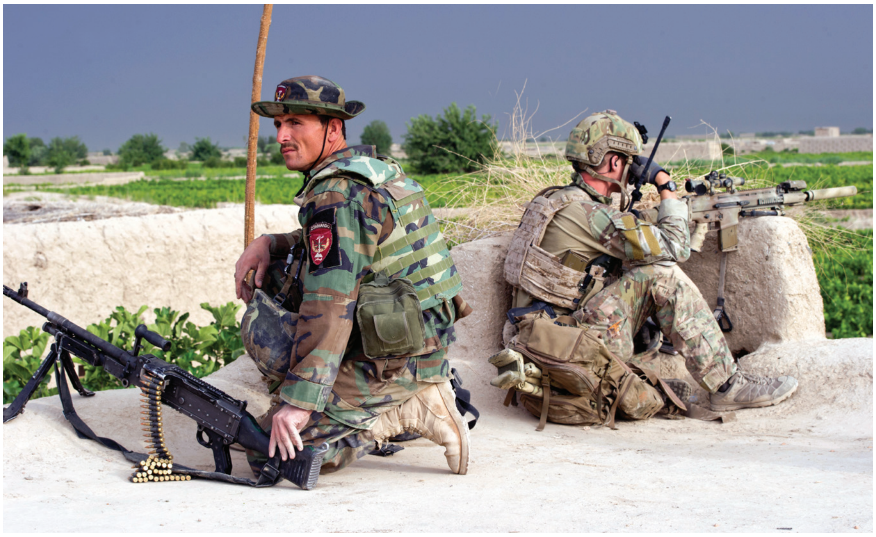
The following year the Regiment also embarked upon a strategy of going after the Taliban in their base areas in Kandahar and Helmand provinces – the so-called "Ranger surge." Initially known as Team Darby but soon renamed Team Merrill (both names in honor of legendary Ranger leaders), the plan centered on reinforcement from two platoons up to a company (initially from 2/75), and increasing the length of their tour by two months (Rangers and most SOF were still serving 3–4 month rotations at that time). These platoons would conduct a night movement into a Taliban base area. One platoon would move into a previously identified compound or group of neighboring compounds and begin to fortify the location, while the other platoon would move into a "Named Area of Interest" (NAI), conducting an advance-to-contact or raiding identified insurgent compounds. Once the NAI operation was complete, those Rangers involved would rendezvous with their sister platoon and, having stirred up the proverbial hornets' nest, would await attack by the insurgents. These operations soon expanded to two consecutive days, with the Rangers extracting on the third night. During these Team Merrill missions they were supported by day by A-10A Thunderbolt IIs (aka "Warthogs") and AH-64D Longbow Apaches, and at night by AH-6s and AC-130s. The Rangers killed hundreds of insurgents during these operations, in what were some of the largest and fiercest firefights of the war. In these Taliban base areas any armed male of fighting age was a legitimate target, since the Rangers operated under Operation "Enduring Freedom" rules of engagement (ROE) rather than the more restrictive ROE required by ISAF.

Dawn, Kandahar Province, 2010: using night-vision goggles, a Ranger who has pulled security-and-isolation duty while an assault element clears a target compound. He wears a Ranger-green Eagle Rhodesian Reconnaissance Vest (RRV) plate carrier with side plates, and the then-recently acquired MultiCam helmet cover. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Spc Brian Kohl)

On one such mission, Operation "Doberman" in Zari Panjay, 2d and 3d Ptns from D Co, 1/75, along with an Afghan "partnered force" mentored by a Special Forces ODA, deployed into a series of three compounds before patrolling into an NAI. When the Rangers returned to their compounds they were attacked by a large and aggressive Taliban force. The insurgents probed each flank of the compounds looking for weaknesses, and when they broke contact they would force local children to walk along with them as they changed positions, knowing that the Rangers or supporting air assets would not engage. The insurgents would then wait until the gunships had to leave for refueling before attacking from another direction. This two-day battle saw a Ranger medic killed and a number of Rangers seriously wounded. When the Chinooks flew in to recover them, every member of the Ranger strike force would fire into likely or identified enemy firing points for a full 30 seconds, to help the helicopter to get in and out safely. In another Team Merrill operation an MH-47 set off a trip-wired grenade as it landed, while a Ranger later stepped on a mine, as the Taliban had booby-trapped certain buildings in their own compounds. During Operation "Matthews" in October 2010, one Ranger was killed and 12 seriously wounded, and by the end of the year 16 Rangers (but hundreds of insurgents) had died on Team Merrill missions.

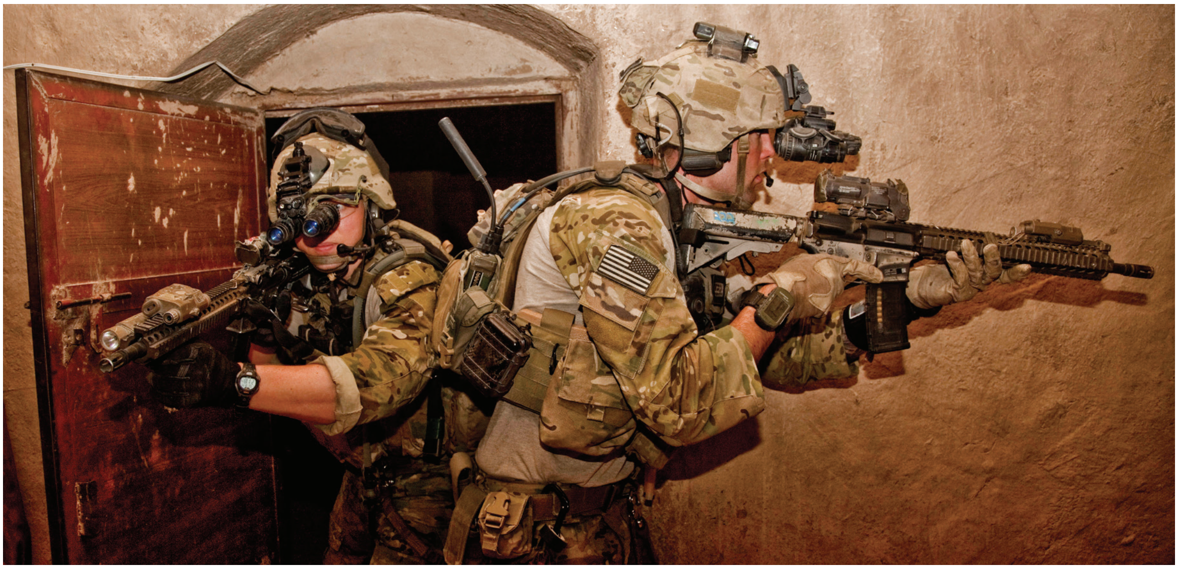
2011–2013: courageous restraint

Team Merrill was eventually stood down in 2011, due to these rising casualty figures and dwindling targets. The new head of JSOC, Adm Bill McRaven, also pushed his units into the counterinsurgency effort, establishing the Village Stability Operations program. This VSO saw SEALs, Army Special Forces, MARSOC units, and British SAS teams deployed to outlying villages to live alongside the civilians, establishing local security forces in an "ink-blot" effort to reduce insurgent influence.



During an operation in Kandahar Province in 2012, this Ranger (right) assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South is photographed alongside a member of an Afghan "partnered unit," who is equipped with a US-supplied M240B medium machine gun. The Ranger has a suppressed Mk 20 sniper support rifle, part of the SCAR family. His body armor appears to be a Crye Assault GEar (CAGE) plate carrier in Area of Responsibility 1 (AOR1) desert camouflage, indicating that he may be a member of the RRC. Details of products by Crye and other manufacturers used by JSOC and Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) units can be found in Elite 208, *US Marine Corps Recon and Special Operations Uniforms & Equipment 2000–15*. (Courtesy USMC; photo MC1 Martin Cuaron)

The Rangers, however, remained on strike operations, mounting night raids aimed at facilitating the VSO program by reducing the insurgent threat. August 2011 saw a Ranger assault element conduct an offset insertion, patrolling into Objective Lefty Grove in the Tangi Valley of Wardak Province. Hunting a Taliban leader, the reinforced platoon cleared the target compound and detained a number of suspects. Several "squirters," potentially including their target, managed to escape on foot during a firefight at the objective, and, with no cutoff group available, a standby Immediate Reaction Force of SEALs was launched in a pair of Air National Guard CH-47D Chinooks. As one of the Chinooks, call sign "Extortion One Seven," flared in to land, an insurgent RPG team managed to hit the rear rotor; in the consequent crash and explosion 38 people were killed. The Rangers immediately released their detainees and ran almost 2½ miles to the crash site. Sadly, they recovered no survivors from the blazing wreck, and two Rangers were wounded by ammunition on board the helicopter cooking off. The Ranger platoon stayed



Helmand Province, August 2012: a pair of Rangers clear a room while hunting for an insurgent leader. They both carry Block 2 M4A1 carbines fitted with Specter DR optics, and wear AN/PVS-15 binocular night-vision goggles. Note also the wrist-mounted Garmin GPS. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Spc Justin Young) on the ground until the next day, recovering the bodies of the fallen SEALs and aviators.

Photographed during a nighttime kill-or-capture mission in Logar Province in March 2013, this Ranger mans a recently adopted M240L medium machine gun made largely of titanium, thus reducing the weight of the weapon by about 5lbs. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Coty Kuhn)

Afghan political intervention, and the aftermath of the mistaken shooting of a number of civilians by Rangers during a raid in Gardez in February 2010, resulted in several changes to ROE for night raids. Firstly, there was an insistence upon Afghans leading the raid (the minimum on Ranger operations was seven Afghans); secondly, new restrictions required a call-out by loudspeaker to be attempted, again by the partnered Afghans (which often resulted in insurgents "squirting" from the target); and thirdly, all operations had to be cleared through an Afghan authority known as the Operational Coordination Group. A JSOC briefing noted that night raids typically proceeded in the following manner: "We isolate the compound, and do a tactical callout – 80 percent of the time no shots are even fired. The targeted individuals comply with the guidance given in their native language; we separate the woman and children from the military age males, begin tactical questions, begin sensitive site exploitation, [and] get all the communication devices, pocket litter [etc] off the objective."

Even after the tragedy of "Extortion One Seven" the Rangers' worst day in Afghanistan was still to come. During a raid in October 2013, Rangers triggered a dozen IEDs hidden within and around a target compound in Panjwai. Two Rangers, an attached Cultural Support Team member, and a military policeman were killed in the blasts. Eight other Rangers were seriously hurt, including a number with life-altering wounds, when a "squirter" detonated a suicide-bomb vest, and a further six Rangers were later wounded by a second suicide bomber. Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists found and rendered safe no fewer than ten additional IEDs at the site.

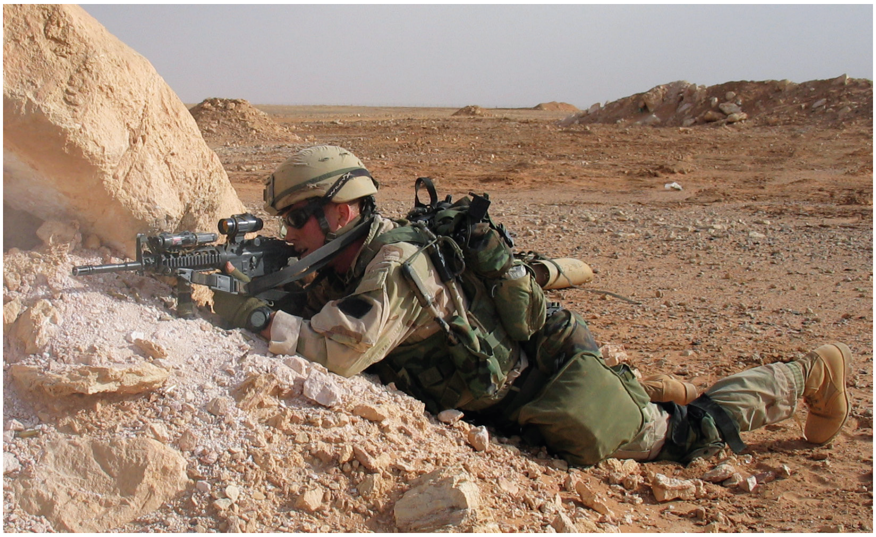
At the time of writing, Rangers were still deployed in Afghanistan in support of counterterrorism operations as part of both Operation "Freedom's Sentinel" (which replaced Operation "Enduring Freedom" in 2014), and the ISAF-led Operation "Resolute Support."

OPERATION "IRAQI FREEDOM"

Iraq 2003–2010

For the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the Ranger Regiment was again placed under the direct command of JSOC, forming an integral part of Joint Special Operations Task Force 20 based out of Arar in Saudi Arabia. In the official history there is scant mention of Task Force 20, and none of its JSOC units: "The 75th Ranger Regiment, a quick reaction force from the 82d Airborne Division, and one High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) composed Task Force 20, another SOF task force assigned to the west and the south." Not mentioned was a squadron from Delta, later increased to two, who formed Task Force Wolverine, nor elements from the US Air Force 24th Special Tactics Sqn along with supporting 160th SOAR assets.

One of the first missions assigned to the Regiment in the operational plan was very much a traditional Ranger task – the seizure of Baghdad International Airport (then known as Saddam International). The plan called



A Ranger from A Co, 1/75 deployed in support of operations in Iraq in late April 2003, wearing Woodland-pattern SPEAR/BALCS combined body armor and load-bearing equipment over his DCU uniform. Note, carried on his back, a pair of bolt cutters used during breaching tasks. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

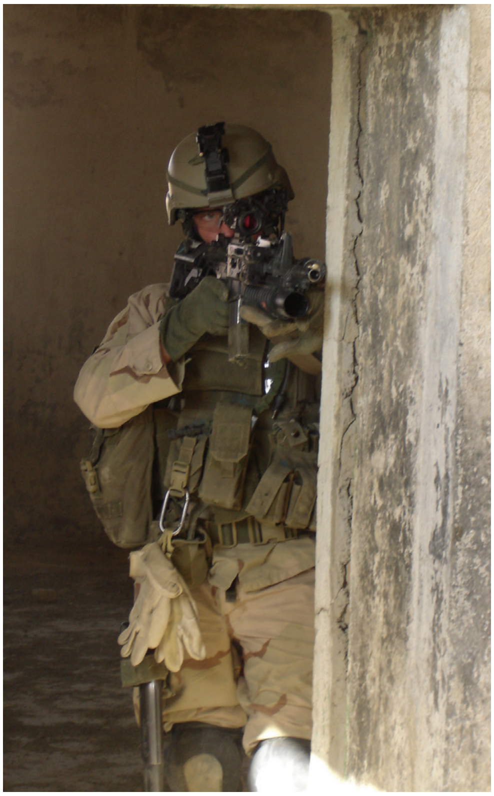
for a helicopter assault force from Task Force 20 to pave the way for a Ranger combat drop to secure the airfield for the arrival of follow-on forces from the 2d Bde of 82d Airborne Division. Full-scale exercises were conducted at Forts Benning and Bragg in preparation for this mission, but it was eventually canceled on March 24 due to the unexpectedly rapid advance of conventional forces through southern Iraq.

A platoon from 3/75 Rangers was also tasked to protect Task Force Hunter, the codename for the HIMARS unit attached to Task Force 20. They were joined by an 82d Abn Div antitank company mounted in TOW II-equipped Humvees to defend against Iraqi armor. An additional force protection element raised from B Co, 2/75 and christened Task Force Spear was given the task of guarding the resupply convoys that entered Iraq to rearm and refuel the HIMARS of Task Force Hunter.

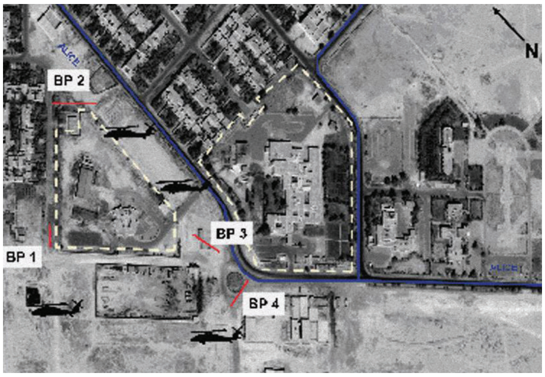
The Rangers and Task Force 20 were supported by another unusual component: main battle tanks. Team Tank harked back to Col William Darby's "Cannon Company" – four halftracks mounting 75mm howitzers that were deployed alongside Darby's Rangers in Italy in 1943. The idea was to provide Task Force 20 and the Rangers with an armored capability to destroy Iraqi tanks. The job eventually fell to the tankers of C Co, 2d Bn, 70th Armor Regiment, who provided ten M1A1 Abrams tanks and associated support vehicles. For the duration of offensive operations Team Tank was placed under the temporary command of 1/75 Rangers.

After the cancellation of the Baghdad International Airport mission, Rangers from C Co, 3/75 conducted a nighttime combat drop to seize a desert airstrip near al Qaim codenamed Objective Roadrunner, to act as a forward staging area and FARP; the same company carried out a similar jump on March 24. A day earlier, A Co, 1/75 mounted in GMVs, along with a battalion HQ

A Ranger clearing a target building in Iraq in 2003–04; note the fast-rope gloves hanging from his RACK, indicating his method of insertion. Hanging below these can be seen a shortened Remington 870 shotgun, carried for breaching doors. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)



element, secured Objective Coyote, another desert airstrip, in preparation for offensive operations against Objectives Sidewinder South and Sidewinder North. After a delay due to the infamous dust storm that halted almost all Coalition operations in southern and western Iraq, the Rangers seized Objective Sidewinder South, the airfield and garrison at Nukhayb. On March 27, C Co, 1/75 along with the attached AT company relieved A Co; the latter, supported by battalion 120mm mortars, AH-6s, and Task Force Hunter, went on to attack Objective Sidewinder North, the military garrison in the village of Mudaysis.



A briefing slide showing Objective Beaver, the al Qadisiyah Research Center, and the four Ranger blocking positions around it. This objective was raided on March 26, 2003 by an assault force from SEAL Team 6 supported by the Rangers of B Co, 2/75. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

March 26 & 27: Objectives Beaver & Serpent

On March 26, SEALs from Team 6 and Rangers from B Co, 2/75 conducted a heliborne assault against Objective Beaver; according to the official history, "in a swift and decisive raid, the Rangers overran the lakeside palace that constituted the research center, although not without a fight from its occupants." Beaver was the codename for the al Qadisiyah Research Center, a suspected chemical and biological warfare facility located south of the Haditha Dam (see below).[5]

The operation against Objective Beaver represents a typical template for a helicopter assault-force raid. Four MH-60Ks would deliver Ranger chalks onto four points around the target building, to establish blocking positions and isolate the objective. A pair of MH-47Es would deposit the SEAL Team 6 assault force directly outside the target building, while two MH-6s darted overhead carrying SEAL aerial sniper teams. Dedicated gunship support was provided by a flight of AH-6s and two MH-60L Direct Action Penetrators (DAPs) – Black Hawk gunships. Two further MH-47Es orbited nearby carrying a Ranger Immediate Reaction Force and CSAR element.

As the helicopters approached the target location they began to receive enemy fire (in all two MH-47Es and three MH-60Ks would be damaged by ground fire). As the Rangers raced from the Black Hawks one was shot in the back, the round penetrating his body and lodging in the front trauma plate of his body armor. He was flown to Objective Roadrunner, where a surgical team on a waiting C-130 stabilized his condition. A crew chief from the 160th SOAR was also severely wounded by small-arms fire, and was likewise evacuated to Roadrunner. The Rangers on the objective engaged numerous enemy, both uniformed and militia, while the SEALs conducted a sensitive site exploitation (SSE), searching for evidence of chemical or biological munitions. After 45 minutes on the ground, during which the supporting AH-6s and DAPs drove off a number of enemy attempts to reinforce the Research Center, the Rangers collapsed their perimeter, climbed aboard the MH-60Ks, and headed back to Arar.

On March 27 the Rangers of A Co, 3/75 made a night parachute drop to seize Objective Serpent, a critical Iraqi military airfield later known as H-1 Air Base. After a bumpy ride to the target thanks to Iraqi air defenses, the Rangers dramatically recited the Ranger Creed as they stood up and prepared to make their static-line jump from 500ft, which led to more than a dozen

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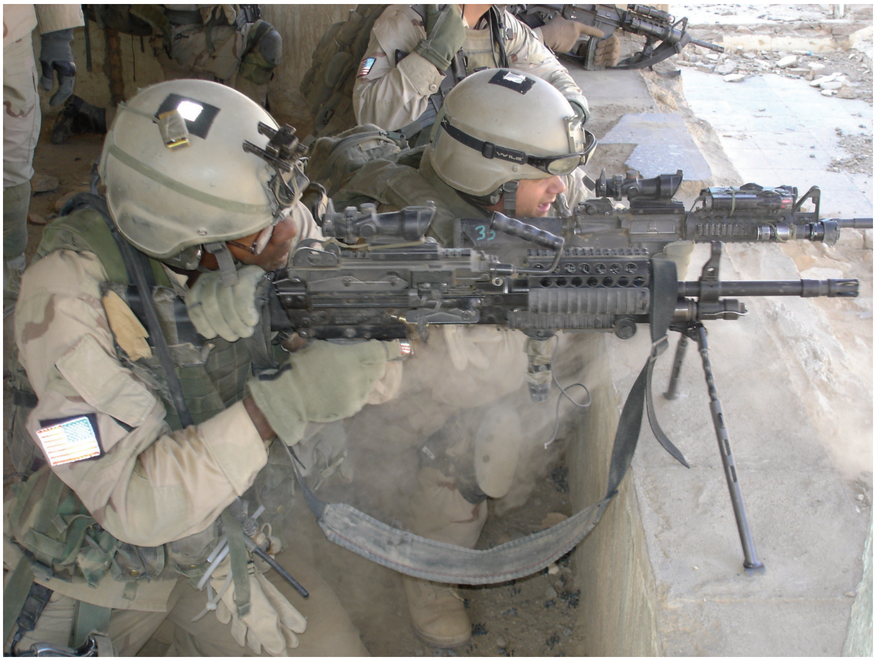
[5] For a map of Iraq, see Elite 170 *Special Operations Forces in Iraq*, page 5.

A machine-gunner suppressing an insurgent target somewhere in Iraq with a Mk 48 medium machine gun. Both the Mk 48 and the M4A1 carried by his assistant gunner mount the magnified Trijicon ACOG optic. Note on his sleeve an infrared reflective flag patch, and the squares of glint tape fixed to their helmet tops to identify them as "friendlies" to aircraft overhead. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)



landing injuries. These were exacerbated by the fact that each Ranger carried in excess of 220lb of ammunition and equipment, in the expectation of having to hold the objective against Iraqi counterattacks for an unknown length of time in typical Airborne manner.

Jumping with the Rangers was a detachment from the Army's 27th Engineer Battalion, who quickly went to work clearing the runway of a number of immobilized vehicles the Iraqis had dragged in to block the tarmac. The Rangers fanned out and secured the immediate area, which appeared devoid of Iraqi military. A number of Ranger All-Terrain Vehicles had been parachuted in for casualty evacuation, and these were used to recover the more seriously injured Rangers from the drop zone. The Rangers and Engineers had H-1 Air Base operational and ready for follow-on forces in just five hours. This was significant to the Coalition war effort, as the US Army's official history makes clear: "The jump onto Objective Serpent was a relatively small operation in the scope of the war in Iraq; however, it was a critical part of the overall campaign in the western desert of Iraq. H-1 Air Base became a mission support site (staging area) for other operations across the western half of Iraq, including the B Co, 3d Ranger Battalion assault on Haditha Dam."

April 1–9: the Haditha Dam

Perhaps the Rangers' biggest operation of the invasion was the seizure of Objective Lynx, the Haditha High Dam complex stretching for over 6 miles on the Euphrates River. Planners feared that Saddam Hussein might deliberately breach the dam, releasing nearly 2 cubic miles of water to flood advancing Coalition Forces. The fact that Saddam had ordered oilfields set ablaze during the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait in 1991 lent credence to this fear. The dam was also one of four identified key deployment areas for Iraqi forces, and Task Force 20 believed that tying them down there would hasten the end of the war.

The surrounding area was home to an Iraqi armored battalion, with an infantry company apparently stationed at the dam itself. These forces were supported by Saddam Fedayeen irregulars, numerous South African-made 155mm howitzers, and a heavy concentration of AA guns and surface-to-air missile batteries. The one advantage the Rangers possessed was that the Iraqi defenses were configured to face a threat from the south, while the Rangers would strike from the west. They also benefited from covert "shaping" operations conducted by Delta. Riding into the area on nine specially modified All-Terrain Vehicles fitted with infrared headlights and special mufflers that reduced engine noise, the operators marked the locations of Iraqi defenses that were later destroyed by preparatory air strikes prior to the Ranger mission.

The mission had originally been given to Delta, with the Rangers assigned to conduct deception operations to draw off the enemy, but due to the expected level of resistance the task of seizing the dam was passed to the Regiment. A total of 154 Rangers from B Co, 3/75 along with 3d Ptn, C Co, two attached 3/75 sniper teams, a 120mm mortar section, a battalion HQ element, and a team of mechanics to maintain their vehicles, would eventually depart H-1 Air Base for an overland assault. This ground assault force would be accompanied by a detachment from Delta who would guide the Rangers into the target area, and a small team of specialists from the US Air Force's 24th Special Tactics Sqn who would control aerial fires. The Rangers would be mounted in a mix of GMVs and cargo Humvees, nine men crammed into each vehicle. At the same time A Co, 3/75 would secure the vital Ramadi Highway Bridge to the south.

The task of seizing and holding the southwestern end of the dam, establishing blocking positions, was given to 1st Ptn, B Co; 2d Ptn, B Co was assigned the northeastern end; 3d Ptn from C Co would secure the dam's power station, and deploy blocking positions to intercept any enemy reinforcements dispatched from nearby Haditha. The 3d Platoon of B Co remained at H-1 Air Base as force protection and Task Force QRF. Supported by a pair of AH-6s, the ground assault force drove directly onto the dam at dawn on April 1, 2003. They faced little initial resistance, and the key objectives were secured without bloodshed.

This would soon change as the Rangers at the northeastern end of the complex began to receive effective RPG fire. One of the sniper teams engaged a number of these Iraqi RPG gunners at ranges stretching to over 1,000 yards, and the firing ceased. (The snipers were equipped with both 7.62x51mm M24 and SR-25 rifles, and .50cal M107s that could engage targets out to a reported 2,000-plus yards; they also acted as forward observers for the Rangers' 120mm mortars.) As elements of 2d Ptn manoeuvred to push out security to the northeast an Iraqi Army truck approached, and was engaged with .50cal fire from the Rangers' GMVs. The truck held a reinforced squad of Iraqi troops; five of them were killed initially, and the survivors became involved in an extended firefight with the Rangers. Concurrently, the AH-6s engaged and destroyed an Iraqi bunker and an S-60 AA gun.

Meanwhile 3d Ptn, C Co also became embroiled in a firefight with troops stationed at Objective Cobalt, the power plant and transformer buildings. One squad provided suppressive fire while the other Rangers leapfrogged forward to capture a number of Iraqis; while 3d Ptn managed to clear the majority of the buildings on Cobalt, they would suffer repeated counterattacks by Iraqi forces including fanatical Fedayeen militia. During one of these counterattacks an Iraqi truck was destroyed by a Ranger anti-armor team with an M3 Carl Gustav RAWS.

On top of the dam, the Iraqis began what would become a terrifyingly familiar routine for the Rangers of 1st and 2d Ptns: 82mm mortar barrages. The sniper teams and the AH-6s, along with supporting strike aircraft and about 12 fire missions from a HIMARS battery located back at H-1 Air Base, eventually managed to suppress most of the mortar firing points, but the bombs continued to rain down for a number of days. One mortar position located on a rocky island received the attentions of both a Ranger FGM-148 Javelin ATGM and a pair of 1,000lb bombs dropped from US Air Force A-10As.

On April 2 the mortars would be joined by an even greater threat as the Iraqi 155mm howitzers began to periodically pound the Ranger positions. Although an estimated 350-plus 155mm shells landed in and around the dam, remarkably not one Ranger was killed by the bombardment, although several sustained serious wounds. They including one young Ranger who was blinded by an artillery fragment; when the 160th SOAR were alerted to the severity of the casualty they flew a desperate daylight mission to extract him. There were also a number of lucky escapes, including three Rangers who were occupying a hull-down position in their GMV. A 155mm round landed on the edge of their position, blowing all three from the vehicle and lifting and moving the GMV sideways, but none of the soldiers suffered anything worse than temporary hearing loss. Eventually, air strikes directed in by the Special Tactics Combat Controllers against artillery positions identified by the RRD began to reduce the indirect fire threat. The Rangers and their Combat Controllers eventually destroyed 29 Iraqi AFVs, three trucks, 24 mortar positions, and almost 30 of the 155mm howitzers, and inflicted some 230 Iraqi infantry casualties. At about this stage the men were ordered to shave, despite being in the middle of a pitched battle.

By the fifth day of the operation, enemy indirect fire had been largely silenced and the Rangers managed to expand their perimeter, overcoming the last pockets of resistance. A pair of M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tanks dispatched from Task Force 20's Team Tank arrived on April 6 to reinforce them. While combat operations continued above ground, a former Special Forces engineer worked tirelessly below ground with the dam's Iraqi civilian staff to repair both damage from Iraqi artillery and years of neglect that had left the dam in a perilous state. The plan to seize the dam had called for the Rangers to be on the ground for 24 hours but to be prepared for a possible 48-hour stay. It was in fact a week before 3d Ptn from B Co eventually relieved the battle-worn Rangers at the dam, who were flown back to H-1 Air Base.

To date this is the longest recorded ground combat involving a Ranger unit since Vietnam; four Rangers were wounded at the objective and were flown out by helicopters of the 160th SOAR. Three others were killed while manning a blocking position interdicting the adjacent highway on April 3. A civilian SUV approached the position just after midnight and two women, one visibly pregnant, ran from the vehicle in apparent distress. Several Rangers went forward to assist them, but, sensing danger, their captain

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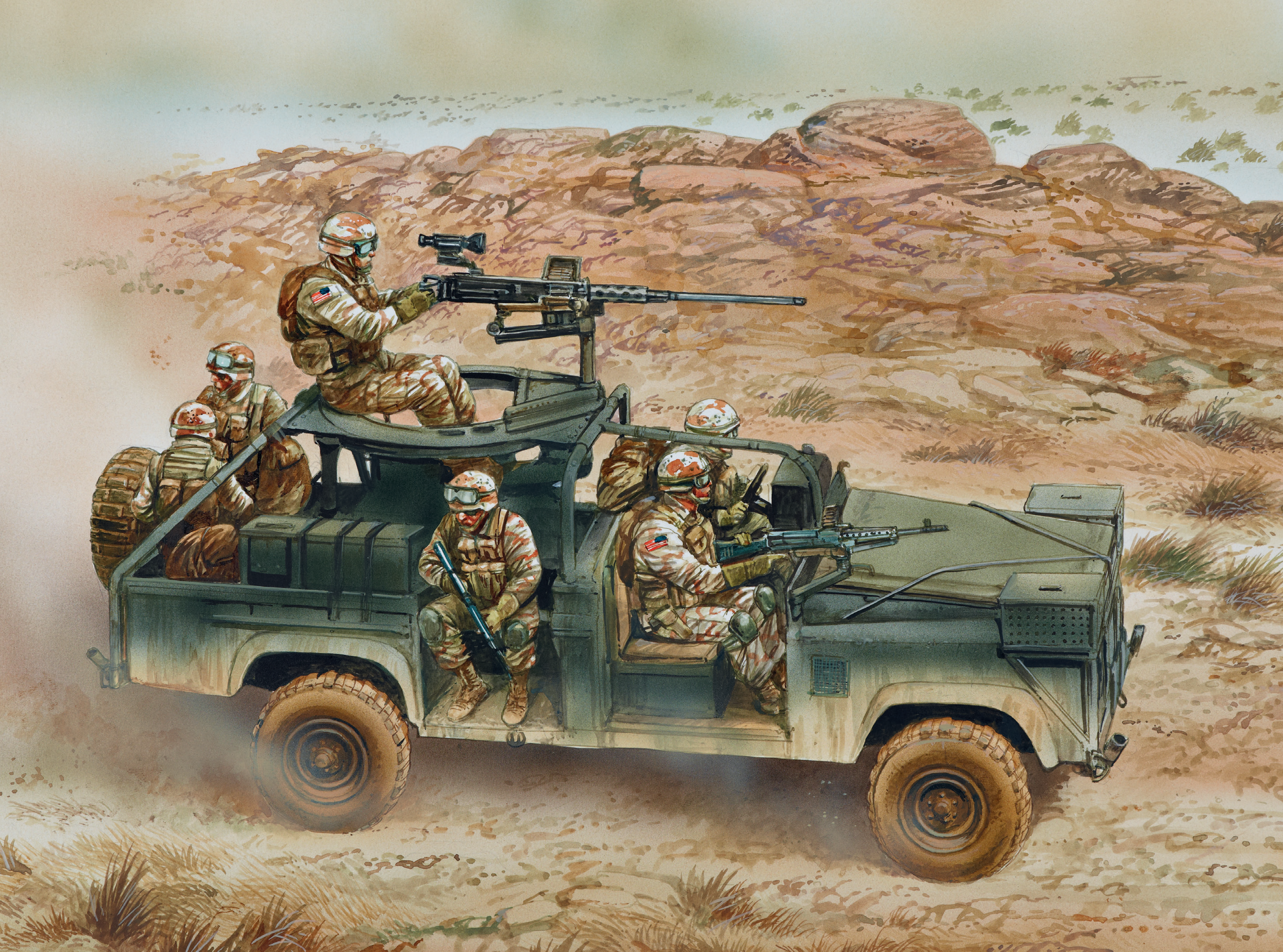
RANGER SPECIAL OPERATIONS VEHICLE, *c.*2001

The classic Ranger vehicle, the RSOV was built on a Land Rover 110 chassis; they served in Panama and Afghanistan, although in recent years they have been replaced by the GMV (see Plate F). Along with the base model, with a crew of seven, three other specialist types saw service: the medical MEDSOV, the mortar-carrying MORTSOV, and a communications variant known as the Shark. Each Ranger battalion was equipped with a dozen standard RSOVs organized into two-vehicle sections, one mounting .50cal M2 heavy machine guns and the other 40mm Mk 19 automatic grenade launchers. The vehicles were painted a dark drab green.



Valorous Unit Award

For extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy. During the period 30 March 2003 to 9 April 2003, the Joint Task Force displayed extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Members of the United States Army and Air Force Special Operations units displayed exceptional gallantry while performing their mission to seize the enemy-occupied Hadithah Dam in Al Anbar Province, Iraq, to obtain a communication line across the Euphrates River and to prevent the enemy from destroying the dam.

These elements fought admirably in a series of direct and indirect enemy engagements against squad-sized and platoon-sized elements, 155 millimeter artillery and heavy mortar fires to clear the dam and destroy enemy forces in the vicinity. Their brave performance and determination resulted in complete mission success.

ordered them back and approached the women himself. As he neared the SUV the vehicle detonated, killing the captain and two other Rangers instantly and badly wounding a fourth. These were the first Americans to be killed by a suicide-bomber in Iraq; they would be far from the last.

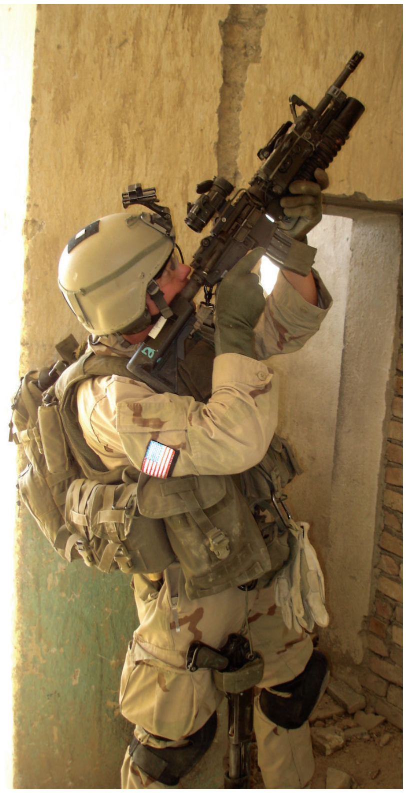
Other April operations

April 1 also saw other Rangers involved in a high-profile Task Force 20 mission: the rescue of Pvt Jessica Lynch from an Iraqi hospital. Lynch had been part of an Army maintenance company that had taken a wrong turn in the city of Nasiriyah on March 23 and driven into an Iraqi ambush. Lynch and five other US personnel were captured; after a tip-off from an informant, planning began for a rescue operation.

While SEAL Team 6 conducted the breach into the hospital to rescue Lynch, the Rangers of A and B Cos, 1/75 were infiltrated into the hospital grounds by US Marine Corps CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters to isolate the

Rangers conduct a Task Force North operation in Mosul, Iraq, December 2006. They wear ACU digital-camouflage uniforms and RRV armor plate carriers, and their weapons mount a mix of ACOG and Aimpoint optics. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment) building and prevent Iraqi reinforcements from interfering with the operation. A smaller Ranger element also arrived as part of a ground assault force in GMVs. The Rangers, wearing bulky Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) suits – the current term for chemical, biological, radiation, and nuclear protection – encountered no enemy on the objective, although the mission was not without danger: the CH-46s received RPG fire during their approach, and a low-flying MH-6 was nearly downed over the objective by a Ranger breaching charge. After the SEALs successfully extracted Lynch, the Rangers were informed that the bodies of a number of deceased Americans from the ambushed convoy were buried outside the hospital. With no digging tools, the Rangers instead dug with their hands; NCOs assigned the more junior enlisted men to security while the NCOs themselves conducted the grisly task of digging the bodies out. Nine were eventually recovered; they were carefully loaded onto the GMVs, to be repatriated to their families in the United States.

On the night of April 8 the first joint Ranger operation with Team Tank saw the armor supporting an attack on Objective Camel: K-2 airfield near Baiji, north of Tikrit. This mission ended in the loss of one tank; operating under night vision, the M1A1 managed to drive into an open pit and flip over, trapping the crew inside. Rangers assisted in their eventual rescue; the tank itself, completely immobilized, still held sensitive items that could not be allowed to fall into enemy hands, so it was destroyed with two 120mm rounds from another M1A1. Sadly, a Ranger Reconnaissance Detachment GMV was mistakenly engaged by one of Team Tank's M1A1s and destroyed, killing an attached Combat Controller from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron.

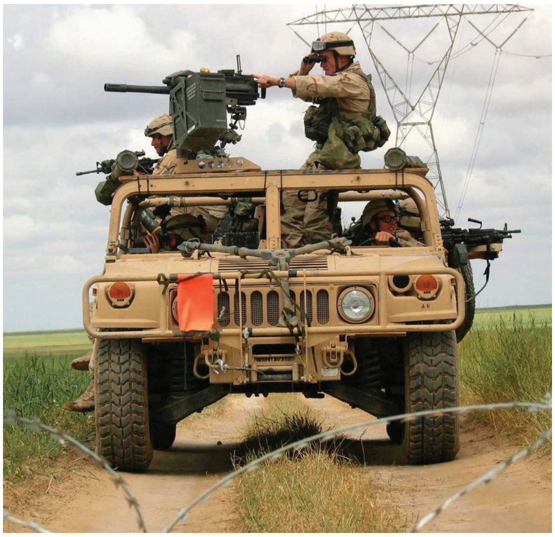


This Ranger clearing an Iraqi building is armed with an M4A1 mounting the shortened M203A1 grenade launcher from the SOPMOD Block 1 kit. The M68 Aimpoint optic has been standard issue within the Regiment for much of the last decade. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

On April 11, A Co of 1/75 and Team Tank were assigned to attack another Iraqi airstrip, Objective Badger at al Sarha. With Ranger 120mm mortars firing in direct support and AH-6s operating overhead, Team Tank and the GMV-mounted A Co conducted a mounted assault directly onto the airfield. The tanks used their main guns to roust out Iraqi infantry as the Rangers dismounted to systematically clear the main buildings. The Abrams also destroyed at least two elderly Iraqi T-55 tanks in a close-range action. A second objective, known as Falcon, was also secured, to allow Rangers to recover the remains of a downed USAF F-15E aircrew. Other elements of Team Tank, C Co from 1/75, and Delta deployed blocking positions along Highway 1, the main north-south route through Iraq, to interdict escaping Ba'ath Party officials. As they were deployed so deep into western Iraq, the Rangers displayed large US national flags on their vehicles in an attempt to stave off any potential fratricide by Coalition aircraft.

On April 14 the Rangers conducted an operation that would become a blueprint for the unit's immediate future in Iraq. With A Co, 2/75 isolating the target building, a helicopter assault force from SEAL Team 6 attempted to capture Abu Abbas, the terrorist mastermind of the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship hijacking in 1985 when a disabled Jewish American passenger, Leon Klinghoffer, was murdered. The first target proved to be a "dry hole," but information led to a second site being raided later that day; B Co, 2/75 secured the perimeter and B Co, 1/75 cleared surrounding buildings while the SEALs searched the target house. The 1/75 Rangers inadvertently captured their quarry when they detained a suspicious individual carrying a number of passports, a satellite phone, and some $35,000 in cash.

Abu Abbas was one of the first HVTs captured by the Rangers in Iraq. After Baghdad fell the Rangers transitioned to supporting Task Force 20 in the hunt for the Ba'athist leaders on the infamous "deck of cards." Mission Support Site Fernandez, a helicopter base named after a Delta operator killed during the war, was established in Baghdad's Green Zone, and 2/75 moved in alongside the Delta squadron to begin manhunting operations across Iraq.



A Ranger GMV pictured in 2002 – compare with Plate F. Note the top-mounted 40mm Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher, the M240 light machine gun on a swing-out mount (here, visible at the rear left side), and the pair of AT-4 (M136) antitank rocket projectiles secured to either side of the roof. Taped-on orange IFF panels were also carried on the sides and the hood top. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

June 11: Objective Reindeer

On June 11, B Co from 2/75 Rangers carried out a nighttime company-level assault on Objective Reindeer, a terrorist camp of foreign fighters at Rawah, Anbar Province. Two platoons air-assaulted directly onto the objective in four MH-60Ks and a pair MH-47Es, with AH-6s and an AC-130 providing aerial fires. A third platoon, reinforced with battalion mortars, approached the target overland in GMVs after a blistering 174-mile (280km) road movement. This ground assault force deployed blocking positions to isolate the target, and established a 120mm mortar position. The SOCOM history, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, describes the target as "a sunken wadi, 35 feet deep, 500 feet long, and 60–150 feet wide, adjacent to a large streambed with steep, rocky sides. Two smaller wadis channeled into Reindeer. The objective was divided into three separate objectives: Dasher, Rudolf and Comet." The assault plan called for 1st Ptn to assault into Dasher and Rudolf while 2d Ptn was to "isolate and clear" Comet. Prior to the helicopter assault force's arrival, Reindeer would be hit with six JDAMs set to airburst over the wadi; the AC-130 gunship would then "soften up" any remaining hostiles on the objective.

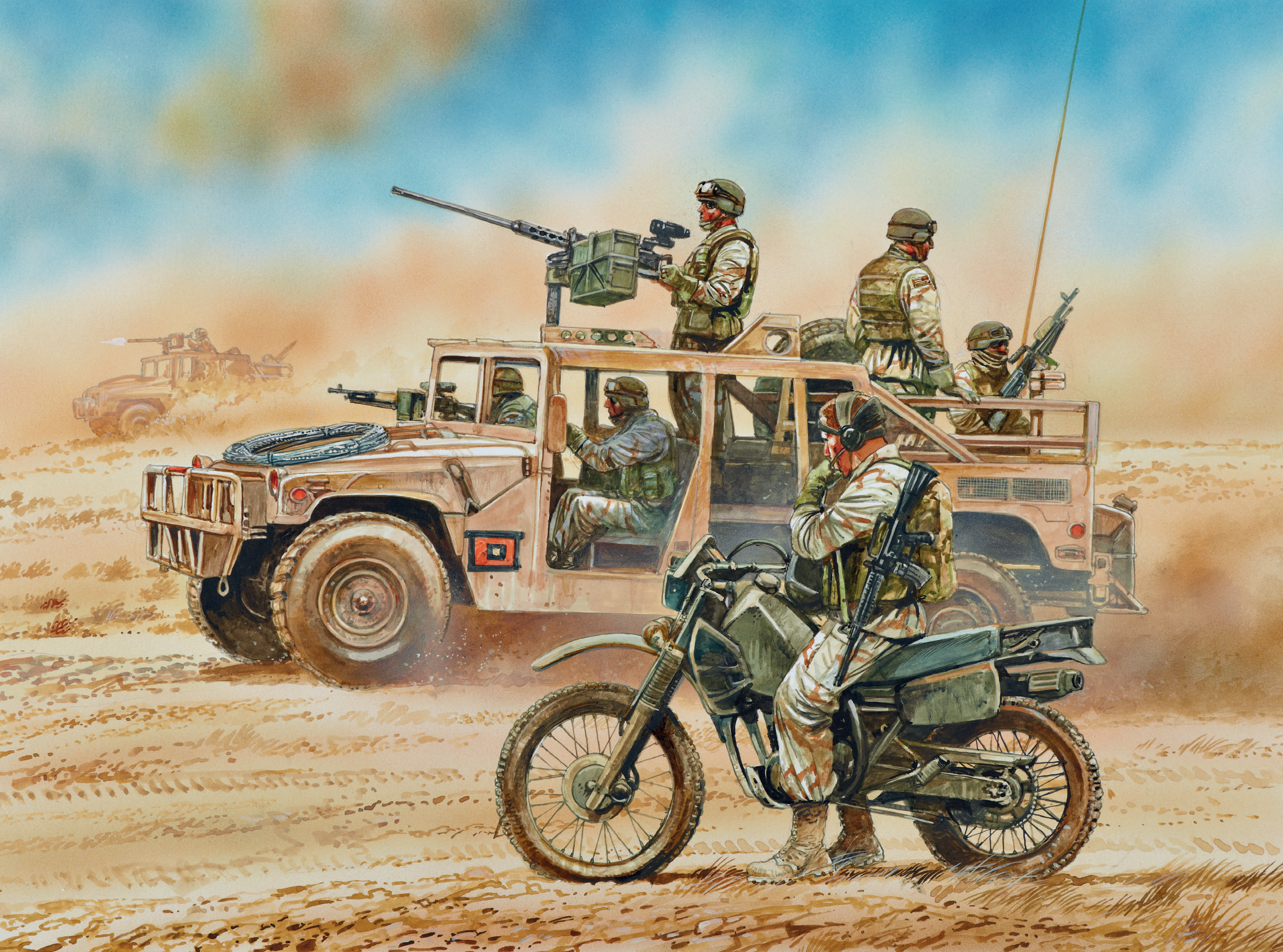
Despite these preparatory strikes, the terrorists met the arrival of the Rangers and their supporting AH-6s with a volley of RPGs. The Ranger platoons deployed their machine-gun teams on the lips of the wadi and assaulted down into the draw, fighting their way through enemy defensive positions. Terrorists concealed in ditches and trenches fired at the Rangers from point-blank range but were dealt with by aimed fire and hand grenades. After a lengthy close-range firefight some 70 enemy were confirmed dead and a large quantity of ordnance was recovered, including no fewer than

F

RANGER GROUND MOBILITY VEHICLE, *c.*2003

The GMV is the unarmored, stripped-down special-operations variant of the Humvee light truck, with doors removed and an open rear body; it is used by the Rangers as both a raiding platform and to provide mounted security during airfield seizures. This example is depicted during training for the invasion of Iraq in 2003; it mounts a .50cal M2 heavy machine gun, and two 7.62mm M240 medium machine guns on swing-out mounts for the front passenger and in the left rear corner of the body. Note the orange and black-taped IFF marker, often repeated on top of the hood and on the front grille. The GMV is accompanied here by a Kawasaki KL250 dirt bike, as used by the Regiment for route reconnaissance.

In Afghanistan, the size and weight of the GMV was found to be unsuitable for many Afghan roads, particularly in the mountainous eastern provinces, and it was soon supplemented in Ranger service with locally procured and suitably modified Toyota pick-up trucks. The Toyotas also had the advantage of presenting a familiar and thus apparently unthreatening silhouette to the enemy, particularly over distance at night.



87 handheld SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. The Rangers suffered only one seriously wounded, who lost a leg to an RPG but had the intestinal fortitude to engage the terrorists' position, emptying a magazine from his M4A1 before collapsing from blood loss; he was soon safely evacuated under fire by an MH-47E.

While 1st and 2d Ptns were flown back to Baghdad Airport, 3d Ptn remained to conduct the SSE while awaiting a relief-in-place by conventional forces from the 327th Infantry Regiment. The 327th landed at the objective in three helicopter lifts, protected by two flights of AH-64Ds. Upon their arrival the helicopters had begun to engage a surviving terrorist target to the northwest when one was struck and shot down by an RPG. The Rangers immediately mounted up two squads in GMVs and fought their way into the crash site (later named Objective Vixen). One GMV raced directly to the burning helicopter, using the vehicle to shield the aircrew from enemy small-arms fire while suppressing the enemy with its .50cal machine gun. Having safely extracted the downed aviators, the Rangers then engaged the terrorists and fought through the difficult terrain, killing a further 14 enemy at close quarters.

Northern Iraq, 2006: Rangers display an insurgent weapons find while conducting kill-or-capture missions against foreign fighters. Note the gray-green Level 5 PCU cold weather jackets, and the forearm-mounted aide-memoire with important call signs, brevity codes, and frequencies written on it. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

2004–2007: Task Force North

In 2004 the Regiment was also tasked with a potential mission deep into neighboring Iran to support a Delta counterproliferation strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, but thankfully the mission was never launched.

Within Iraq itself, the Regiment was kept busy battling the burgeoning insurgency by both former regime elements and, increasingly, the mainly foreign fighters of "al Qaeda in Iraq." JSOC had been assigned the mission of destroying the insurgent networks, and divided up responsibility into geographical regions, assigning task force sub-units to each locality. The Rangers of Task Force Red were given responsibility for Task Force North, initially based out of Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit, and later in Mosul. Former Regiment commander Gen McChrystal had taken over command of JSOC the previous year, and instituted a policy known as F3EAD: "Find-Fix-Finish-Exploit-Analyze-Disseminate." Put simply, JSOC would track the insurgent leaders, financiers, and bomb-makers, and fix their location before attempting to capture or kill the individual. The target site would then be subjected to an SSE, the results of which (from computer hard drives down to "pocket litter" found on the insurgents themselves) would be analyzed to aid in further targeting.

In Mosul these efforts forced the quarry to adopt a policy of leaving the city before nightfall in attempts to avoid the Task Force North raids that were beginning to decapitate the insurgency. After an increasing number of "dry holes," the Rangers took the unprecedented step of reversing their traditionally nocturnal operational cycle. Despite the increased risk to supporting helicopters, they began hitting targets during the day. For this the Rangers used their recently acquired M1126 Strykers to great effect, enabling armored transportation to and from increasingly dangerous objectives.

Other elements were reinforced by platoons of Rangers, who initially took on the role of providing isolation and security for the special-mission units as they raided target locations. When Task Force West was established to go after the foreign fighter "rat-lines" crossing into Iraq from Syria around al Qaim, a Ranger platoon was permanently attached. One Task Force Central operation into Fallujah ended in the Rangers and Delta operators being ambushed during their exfiltration. Two GMVs were immobilized and several Rangers seriously wounded before the force managed to break contact under supporting fire from Little Birds and an orbiting AC-130.

Task Force North were heavily involved in the battle of Mosul in November 2004 as foreign fighters and Iraqi insurgents escaped from Fallujah to that northern city. Ranger and Delta snipers were attached to conventional units, and Task Force North was assigned to help retake an international hotel that had been captured by terrorists.

Task Force North Rangers collapsing their isolation perimeter at the close of a mission. They wear ACU uniforms, and Eagle RRV plate carriers in Ranger green. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

During the following year the operational tempo continued to increase, as did the numbers of Rangers wounded and killed. Their primary target became Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian leader of al Qaeda in Iraq. On February 20, 2005, Rangers supporting a Delta operation against this terrorist kingpin narrowly missed their target when he managed to evade a Ranger roadblock, more by luck than good judgment: a Ranger chalk leader was not confident that the target, racing past them in an SUV, could be positively identified as hostile, and thus the Rangers rightly held their fire. (When al-Zarqawi was eventually tracked down and eliminated by an air strike in June 2006, it was Rangers from 2d Ptn, C Co of 2/75 who accompanied Delta operators to the smoking ruins of his safe-house.)

Task Force North were carrying out up to eight punishing missions in a single night. Many followed a template of driving to an offset location in

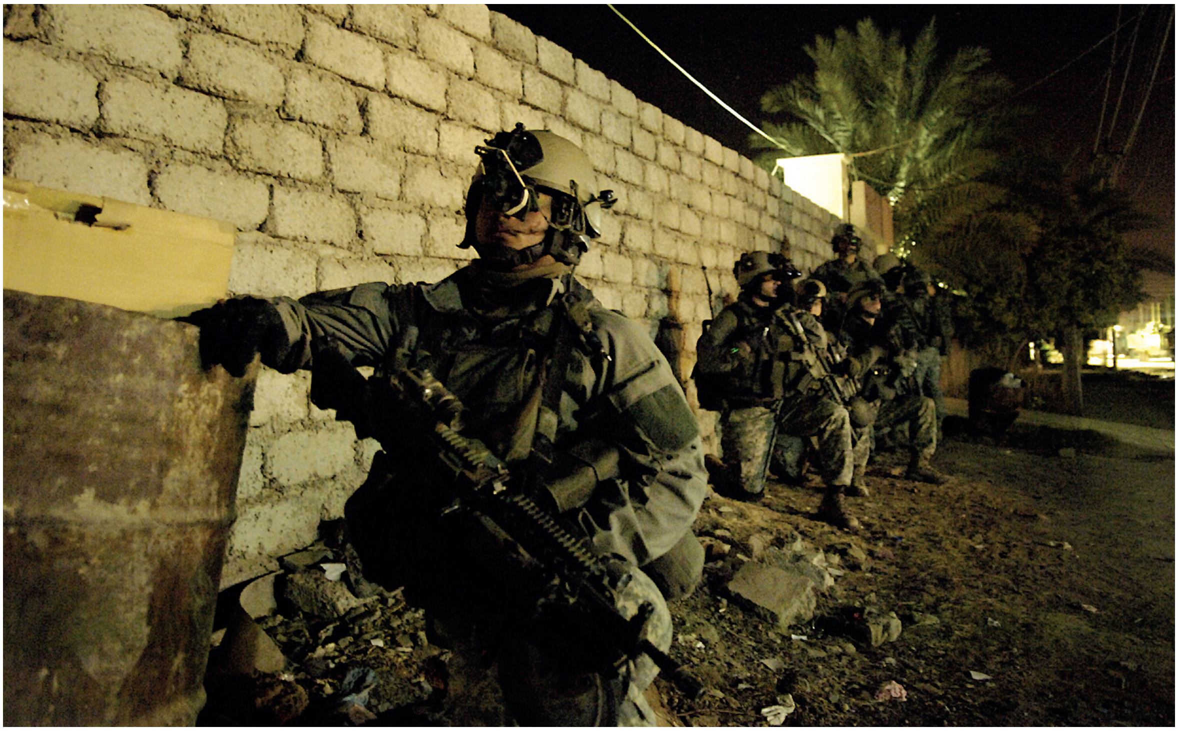
Mosul, Iraq, June 2006: Rangers assigned to Task Force North provide security-and-isolation around a house targeted by Special Forces. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment) their Strykers before dismounting and patrolling into the target on foot to maintain the element of surprise. The Strykers could be brought forward to provide suppressive fire or to evacuate casualties if required. Often the Rangers would aim to conduct a covert breach of the target building, so their insurgent targets only became aware of their presence when they were prodded awake with the barrel of a carbine. If that was not possible, breaching charges and "flashbang" grenades were employed.

On New Year's Day 2006, Task Force North struck a target that yielded an unexpected result. The raid was almost scrubbed: it was the last of seven missions that night for the Rangers involved, it was of low priority, and one of the assigned helicopters was malfunctioning. Luckily the helicopter was repaired, and the Rangers ended up raiding a remote farmhouse, capturing several gunmen without a shot being fired. As they conducted the SSE they discovered, purely by chance, British freelance journalist Phil Sands, who had been kidnapped on December 26 and was being held hostage.

By 2006 Iranian influence on the Iraqi insurgency, particularly in the Shia-dominated south, had become abundantly clear. Iranian-built IEDs known as Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFP) were maiming and killing increasing numbers of Coalition soldiers, and the elite al Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard were actively supporting the insurgents with planning, intelligence, and financial aid.

2007–2008: Task Force 17

Along with the British SAS, the Rangers were given the so-called "counter-Iranian influence" mission, and were placed under the newly established Task Force 17. In October 2007 the Ranger Regiment's CO took command of Task Force 17; this had two SEAL platoons assigned along with a pair of Ranger platoons, and additional SEAL recon and RRD support. Task Force 17



Rangers from Task Force Red conducting a night approach to a target house in April 2007, using a mix of AN/PVS-14 monocular and AN/PVS-15 binocular night-vision goggles. They wear PCU hooded jackets over ACU-pattern uniforms. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

An MH-60L delivers a Ranger assault element onto a target via fast rope. Note the infrared spotlight, visible only through night-vision devices, and the aircraft number attached by adhesive tape to the Black Hawk's fuselage. The team carried by an aircraft is traditionally called a "chalk," the term originating in the World War II use of chalked numbers to show paratroopers which were their assigned aircraft. The 160th SOAR continues the practice, but typically with black masking tape. (Courtesy Dept of Defense)

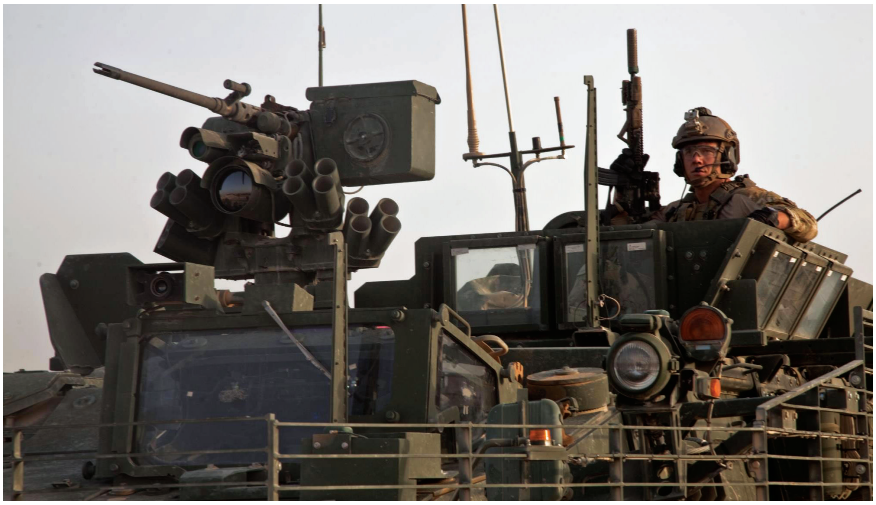
operated under the targeting constraints placed upon it by the Shia-dominated Iraqi government, who were careful to ensure that certain family and tribal members associated with the insurgency stayed off their target lists.

One of Task Force 17's most successful operations actually led to even greater constraints being placed on their targeting. When B Co, 2/75 launched a raid into the notorious Sadr City to hunt a Shia Special Groups leader, the operation sparked off a pitched street battle, with the Rangers conducting a fighting withdrawal that one participant likened to the infamous "Mogadishu Mile." More than 45 insurgents were killed with no Ranger losses. Once the Iraqi government were made aware of the mission, however, permission to conduct operations in Sadr City was immediately withdrawn.

In June 2008 the Rangers eliminated perhaps their highest-profile target: Abu Khalaf, second-in-command of al Qaeda in Iraq. The operation was also illustrative of how far Ranger raiding tactics had evolved. For Objective Crescent Lake a reinforced platoon of Rangers were deployed: one squad was posted as security for the Strykers; one was assigned the task of breaching and conducting the actual assault on the target house; one was held in reserve should the assaulters require reinforcement or casualty evacuation; and one would isolate the surrounding area. An attached four-man team from the battalion's sniper platoon would provide overwatch for the assault team. Overhead, a surveillance aircraft beamed live video to a Rover terminal carried by the platoon leader, giving him an eagle-eye view of the target.

As the assaulters placed their explosive breaching charge, two sentries on the roof stirred and moved forward carrying AK47 assault rifles; both were killed by the sniper team. As the breaching charge detonated the Rangers of the assault element stormed into the building, methodically clearing each room. In one room they detained a man and a woman; as they attempted to restrain the man he reached under his clothing and, fearing he was grabbing for a weapon, the Rangers shot him dead. In the confusion the woman leapt onto the man's body, and was also shot and killed. When both bodies were searched the Rangers discovered that the man was wearing a primed suicide-bomb vest filled with ball bearings that both he and the woman had been trying to detonate. During the shooting, Abu Khalaf himself made a run

Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2012: a Ranger from C Co, 2/75 provides "air guard" security on an M1126 Stryker – compare with Plate G opposite. From 2005, in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the Strykers have provided the Rangers with an armored option that is far quieter than tracked armor for night approaches, and far more protective than GMVs for daylight operations in urban areas. The .50cal M2 heavy machine gun is operated by remote control from within the vehicle, aimed by means of a thermal camera. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Justin A. Young)



for it and emerged onto the roof, pistol in hand, only to be shot dead by the Ranger sniper team. During the SSE the Rangers also discovered the plan for a chemical weapon attack on a Coalition base.

2009–2010: the drawdown

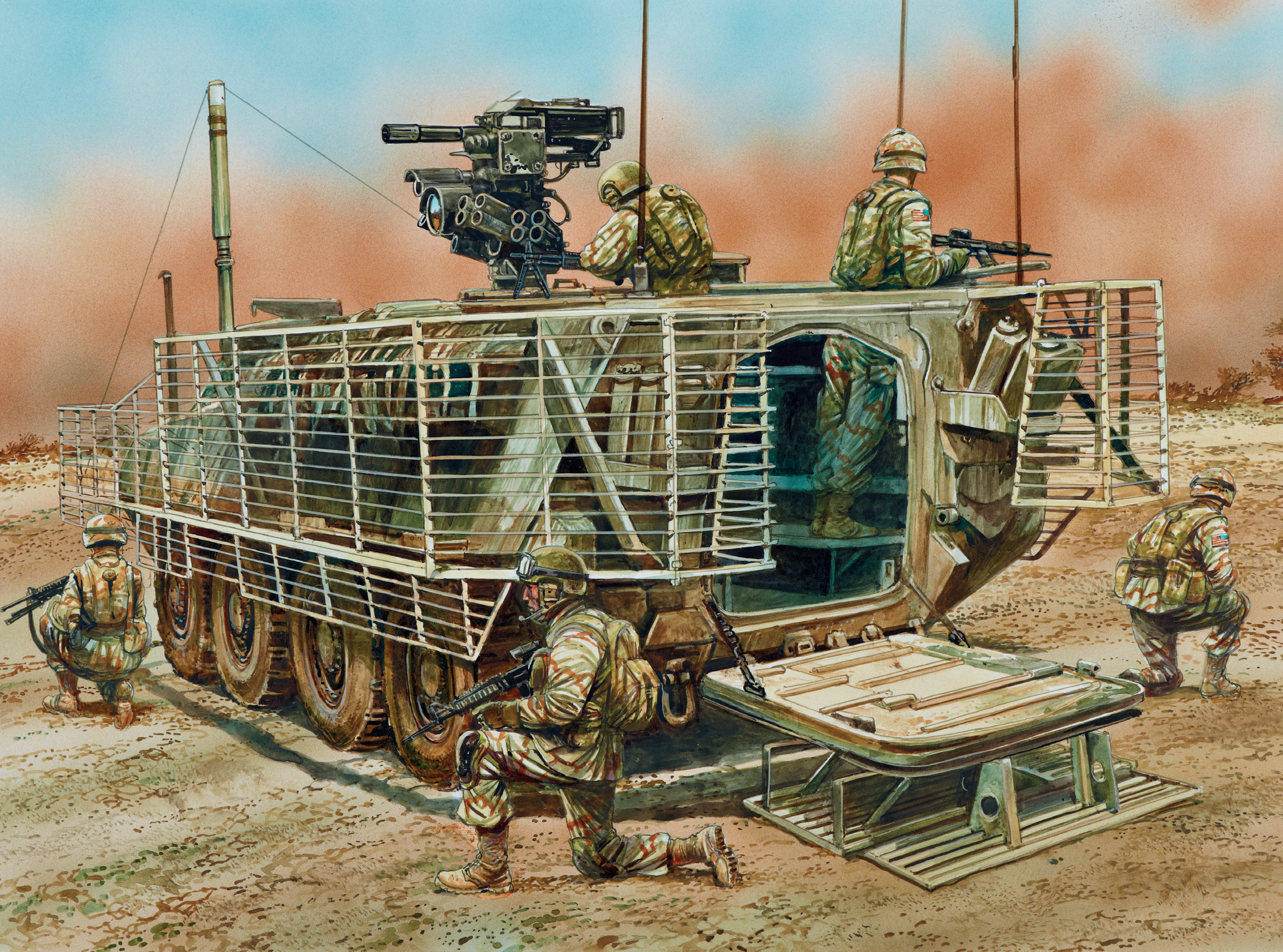
At the time of the Crescent Lake mission the Rangers had been forced to deploy an additional platoon to allow them to conduct a day-and-night raiding cycle, and conducted up to 100 missions in just one three-month deployment. However, with the commencement of the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) in January 2009, JSOC and Ranger operations were further curtailed, with Iraqi judicial permission now required for each and every mission. In April 2010 one of the last Ranger operations in Iraq, a joint raid with Iraqi Special Forces, resulted in the death of Abu Ayyub al-Masri, al-Zarqawi's successor as the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq. He was located in Tikrit, and after a gun-battle the target house was hit by an air strike; one Ranger died in a helicopter crash at the completion of the operation.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE REGIMENT

Until the "industrial strength counterterrorism" developed during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 75th Ranger Regt was still widely perceived, both within Special Operations Command and the wider US Army, as simply elite light infantry. They were tasked with either their traditional airfield-seizure mission, or to provide security for "Tier 1" elements, isolating an objective while the special-mission units went to work on the target. As we

G **M1126 STRYKER, *c.*2006**

First adopted by the Regiment in 2005, the M1126 Stryker 8-wheel Infantry Carrier Vehicle (ICV) proved its worth in urban environments both in Iraq and Afghanistan. Along with much greater armor protection than the GMV (14.5mm, plus additional counter-RPG standoff bar armor as illustrated on this example), the Regiment appreciated the quiet ride afforded by the Strykers that allowed them to approach targets by night. The 40mm Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher or .50cal M2 heavy machine gun mounted in a remote-control weapon station, together with 16x Mk 6 smoke grenade launchers, provide significant suppressive fire should it be required.



A typical example of a Ranger Regiment infantry platoon in 2013. These Rangers from 2/75 carry a mix of 5.56x45mm platforms: SOPMOD Block 2 M4A1s and Mk 46s, all fitted with optics and lasers. What the Rangers term the "platoon direct-action mission" has today become the bread-and-butter of the Regiment, and such missions may involve a wide range of tasks including special reconnaissance, clandestine insertion, direct action, hostage rescue, and sensitive site exploitation. (Courtesy US Army; photo Sgt Robert B. Brown IV)

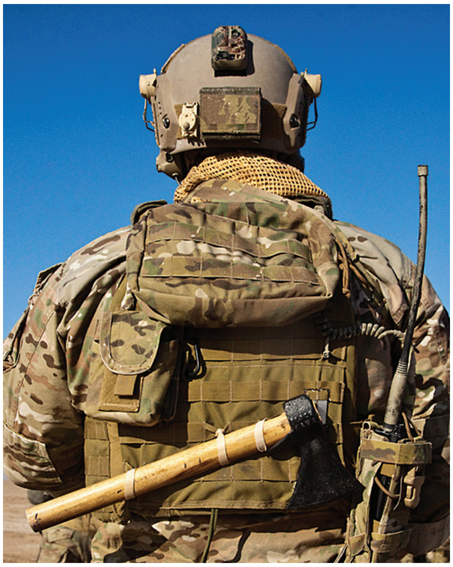
have seen, this continued to be the general assumption during the early stages of both of these conflicts.

Change came incrementally. As the insurgency in Iraq threatened to drag the whole country into the chaos of sectarian civil war, JSOC led the fight against al Qaeda in Iraq and their Sunni allies, and later against the Shia fighters of the Iranian proxy Special Groups. With JSOC came the Regiment, and in time Task Force Red were given their own "target sets," as the operational tempo and casualty rate stretched the special-mission units to the utmost. Given the opportunity, the Rangers repaid in spades the faith that Gen McChrystal placed in his old unit.

As well as the Regiment commanding its own geographical task force in Iraq, the placing of the RRD under the direct command of JSOC in 2004 served to further elevate the Regiment's status. Renamed the Regimental Reconnaissance Company (RRC) in 2007, it became a special-mission unit in its own right, deploying both independently and in support of other JSOC assets.

Although eclipsed in recent years by direct-action missions, the Rangers still train for their airfield-seizure role, as in this December 2014 readiness exercise. The foreground weapon is a Mk 48 medium machine gun mounting the Elcan M145 optic. (Courtesy US Army; photo Edward N. Johnson)

The Regiment was given command of all JSOC Task Force units within the Afghan theater in 2009, confirming their new place at the table. The Rangers raised reconnaissance teams at the battalion level to augment and eventually replace the RRC, and were also at the forefront of operational innovations such as Cultural Support Teams (CST). The female-staffed CSTs could speak with Afghan women during the exploitation phase of a raid, gaining valuable intelligence that within a Muslim culture would simply not have been available to a male Ranger. (At the time of writing, a third woman had completed Ranger School and received the coveted tab; although women are not yet permitted to attempt RASP selection, change is afoot.)



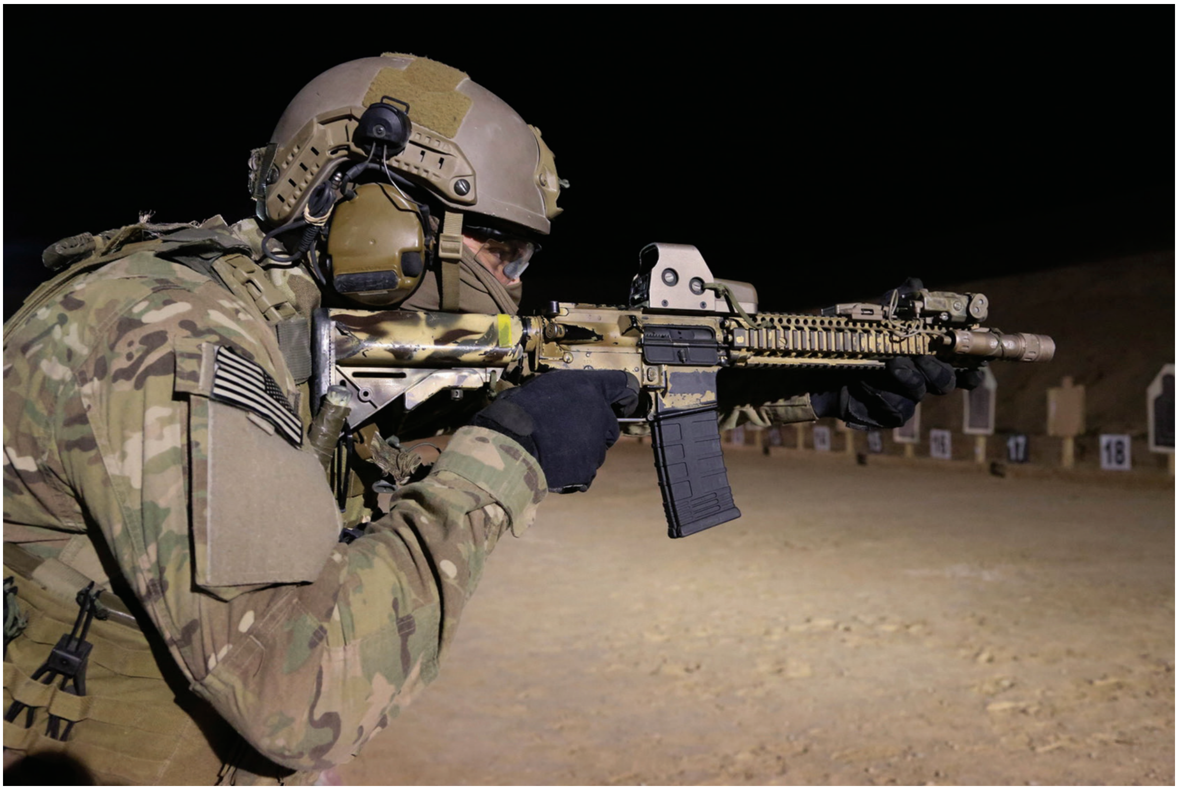
A Ranger from 3/75 pictured in Afghanistan in 2013, carrying that most traditional of Ranger weapons, harking back to the French-Indian Wars – a tomahawk. At the top of his helmet is a HEL-STAR 4 infrared strobe light, to mark him as a "friendly" to both ground troops and aircraft overhead by night. On the back of his helmet, left of the spare battery pack that acts as a counterweight for his night-vision goggles, is a blast meter to record the concussive effect of an IED detonation, for the information of medics treating him. Under his helmet he wears a Sordin headset, with an AN/PRC-148 radio in the pouch at his right rear. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Matthew R. Hulett)

Airfield seizure remains one of the Regiment's Mission Essential Tasks (MET), and it still conducts annual full-scale exercises in this key discipline, including a battalion-level parachute drop. However, today's 75th Ranger Regt recognizes five other key METs: direct action, special reconnaissance, personnel recovery, clandestine insertion, and sensitive site exploitation. Through a cycle of constant but hard-fought evolution, the Ranger Regiment has proven itself the equal of its peers: a thoroughly versatile unit of skilled and experienced raiders who can conduct full-spectrum special-operations missions. A former commander of the Regiment, Col Christopher Vanek, summed up this evolution as follows:

"Before 9/11, the Ranger Regiment was known for quick strikes into hostile territory, to accomplish a specific mission and then redeploy when the mission was completed. You could say the Regiment was Expeditionary-like. Missions like Operation "Urgent Fury" in Grenada and Operation "Just Cause" in Panama are examples of the types of missions the modern Rangers were known for. Afghanistan and Iraq changed all of that. Now we are known as a special-operations force that can operate in sustained combat indefinitely, for years."

WEAPONS

The Regiment's issue sidearm currently remains the 9x19mm M9, the US Army version of the civilian Beretta M92F. The issue of sidearms has become far more prevalent within the Regiment, and from 2007 every deployed Ranger has been issued his own pistol. Principally this is the M9, although the 9x19mm and .40S&W Glock in several variants have become very popular - so much so that Glocks were retained in-theater to hand over to the next rotation as there were not enough to go around. Suppressed Glocks have also been seen carried by members of the Battalion Reconnaissance Teams and the RRC.

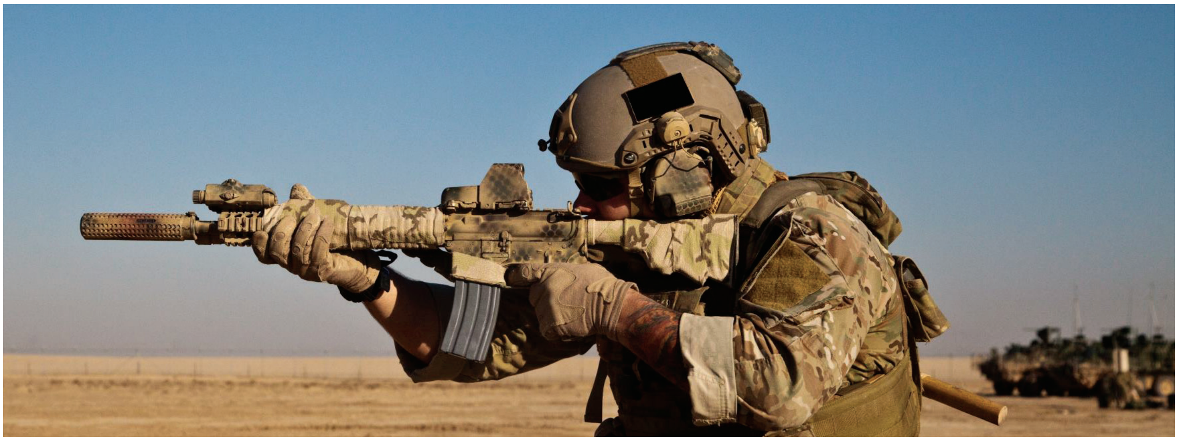


A good view of the Rangers' current issue carbine, a SOPMOD Block 2 M4A1 with hand-camouflaged finish, full-length accessory rails, Magpul PMAG polymer magazine, EOTech 553 optic, Scout weapon light, and LA-5 infrared illuminator. Note also the Crye MultiCam uniform, and the cutaway Ops-Core helmet with side rails for mounting lights and cameras, worn over the MSA Sordin headset. (Courtesy US Army; photo Pfc Dacotah Lane)

Although the Regiment issued the 5.56x45mm M16A2 assault rifle as its principal individual weapon during the operations in Panama and Somalia, since the mid-1990s the carbine-length M4 has become standard issue, followed later by the fully automatic M4A1 variant. The M4A1 also benefited from the Special Operations-Peculiar Modification (SOPMOD) Block 1 Kit first introduced in 1995. This allowed individual Rangers to equip their carbines from a range of accessories dependent on mission profile. These accessories, attached via a mounting rail known as a Picatinny rail, ranged from white and infrared flashlights to various combat optics.

SOPMOD Block 2 was first fielded by the Regiment in 2005. While Block 1 was focused on the M4A1, Block 2 allowed Rangers to mount accessories upon the range of small arms (and in some cases the crew-served weapons) used by the Regiment. Most visible on so-called Block 2 M4A1s is the new full-length Daniels Defense Rail Integration System (RIS) that allows for more accessories to be mounted, and the adoption of both the EOTech close-combat optic and the Elcan Specter that allows the user to switch the optic from 1x magnification for close-quarter battle to 4x magnification for more distant targets.

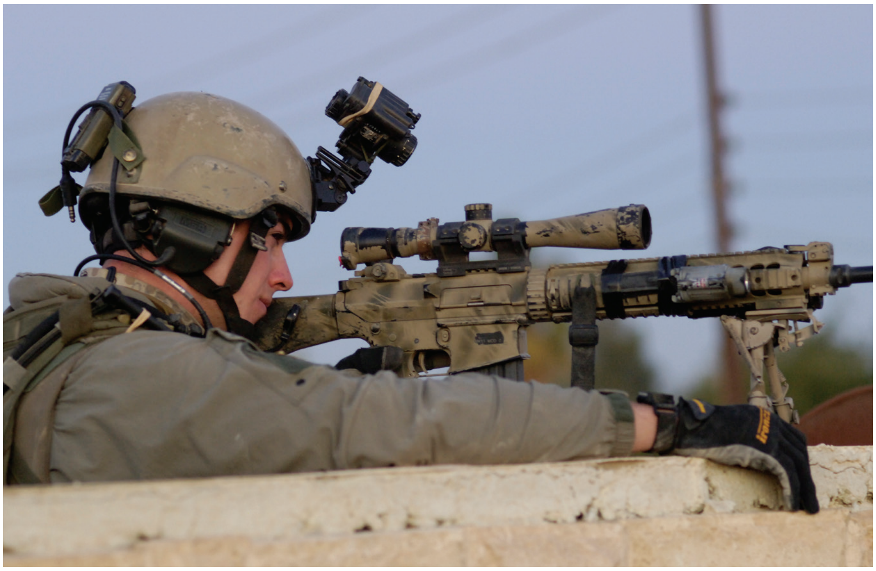
The 5.56x45mm Mk 16 Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle (SCAR) was developed as a replacement for the M4A1, and was combat-trialed by the Rangers in Afghanistan (C Co, 1/75 were the first to kill an enemy with the SCAR in 2009). Amid mixed field reports, the Regiment stayed with their Block 2 M4A1s as standard, but have adopted the 7.62x51mm Mk 17 SCAR as a marksman rifle to supplement and replace the Mk 14 Enhanced Battle Rifle (itself built from the venerable M14). Another member of the SCAR family, the 7.62x51mm Mk 20 Sniper Support



Another hand-painted Block 2 M4A1 carbine, this one fitted with a KAC suppressor. In modern tactical contexts suppressors are not often used for any covert purpose, but simply to reduce the amplified report of weapons fired in confined spaces. Again, note the lack of a camouflage cover for this early-issue Ops-Core helmet, and the camouflage-painted Sordin headset; the Ranger-green plate carrier; and the Stryker ICVs in the right background. (Courtesy US Army; photo Spc Justin A. Young)

Rifle, has also seen service with the Rangers. Along with the Mk 17, it is intended to replace the range of SR-25, Mk 11, Mk 12, and M110 semi-automatic sniper rifles used by the Regiment.

Ranger marksmen and snipers have used the 7.62x51mm SR-25 platform since the 1990s in both its original model and its later SOCOM and Army versions, the Mk 11 and M110 respectively; platoon and later squad designated marksmen also deployed the 5.56x45mm Mk 12 Special Purpose Rifle. Snipers in Iraq judged that the fast follow-up shots and ability to use the SR-25 to clear rooms trumped the marginally increased accuracy of the bolt-action 7.62x51mm M24 sniper rifle. In Afghanistan, Ranger sniper teams routinely deployed with one SR-25 and one M24 or Mk 13, the latter being a heavier bolt-action design chambered for the .300 Winchester Magnum. The M24 is currently being upgraded to the .300 M2010 variant, while the multi-caliber Mk 21 Precision Sniper Rifle will allow Ranger snipers to select their caliber of choice – 7.62x51mm, .300 Winchester Magnum or .338 Lapua Magnum – depending on the mission. The .50cal M107 Special Application Scoped Rifle (or Barrett M82A1) is also still used within the Regiment for extreme-distance and anti-matériel shooting.



Northern Iraq, 2006: a Ranger sniper wearing a PCU cold-weather jacket and armed with the 7.62x51mm Mk 11 Mod 0 rifle fitted with a Leupold scope. This image also gives a good view of the MS2000 infrared strobe light and AN/PVS-14 monocular night-vision device fitted to the back and front of the MICH TC-2001 helmet, respectively. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)

Kabul Province, Afghanistan, March 2012: a Ranger SAW gunner firing his short-barrel Mk 46 light machine gun, fitted with an EOTech optic and LA-5 infrared illuminator. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Sgt Matthew Freire)

The 5.56x45mm M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) was in use since the 1980s, with the lighter Special Purpose Weapon (SPW) variant deployed toward the turn of the century, before being replaced in their turn by the Mk 46 Mod 0, a variant of the SAW designed specifically for SOCOM units. Like conventional units, each four-man Ranger fire team has a SAW gunner who carries the Mk 46; in recent years, older Mk 46s have been replaced with collapsible-stock M249s.

The machine-gunners of platoon weapons squads used the 7.62x51mm M60 medium machine gun until the early 1990s, when the 7.62x51mm M240B became standard issue; in fact, both weapons were deployed to Somalia in 1993. The M240B was supplemented by the 7.62x51mm Mk 48 Mod 0, which was essentially a 7.62x51mm version of the Mk 46. The Rangers were early and enthusiastic adopters of the 7.62x51mm M240L medium machine gun, which features a shortened barrel and reduced weight thanks to the use of titanium in its construction.

Grenade launchers underslung on rifles include the older M203 and the more recently adopted M320, both in 40mm; the latter is also often deployed by the Rangers as a standalone weapon. The Regiment also make use of the full range of hand grenades including fragmentation, chemical smoke, concussion, and several specialist types. The latter include the Rheinmetall Mk 13 Bottom & Top Venting, Extended Length (BTV-EL) multi-bang "flashbang" stun grenade, and the Mk 14 Anti Structure Munition (ASM), a thermobaric grenade ideal for collapsing insurgent tunnels and cave entrances.

Unguided disposable rocket projectiles such as the M72A6 Light Antitank Weapon (LAW) and the AT-4 (also known as the M136) are often carried to engage enemy bunkers – and Afghan grape-drying huts, which are naturally

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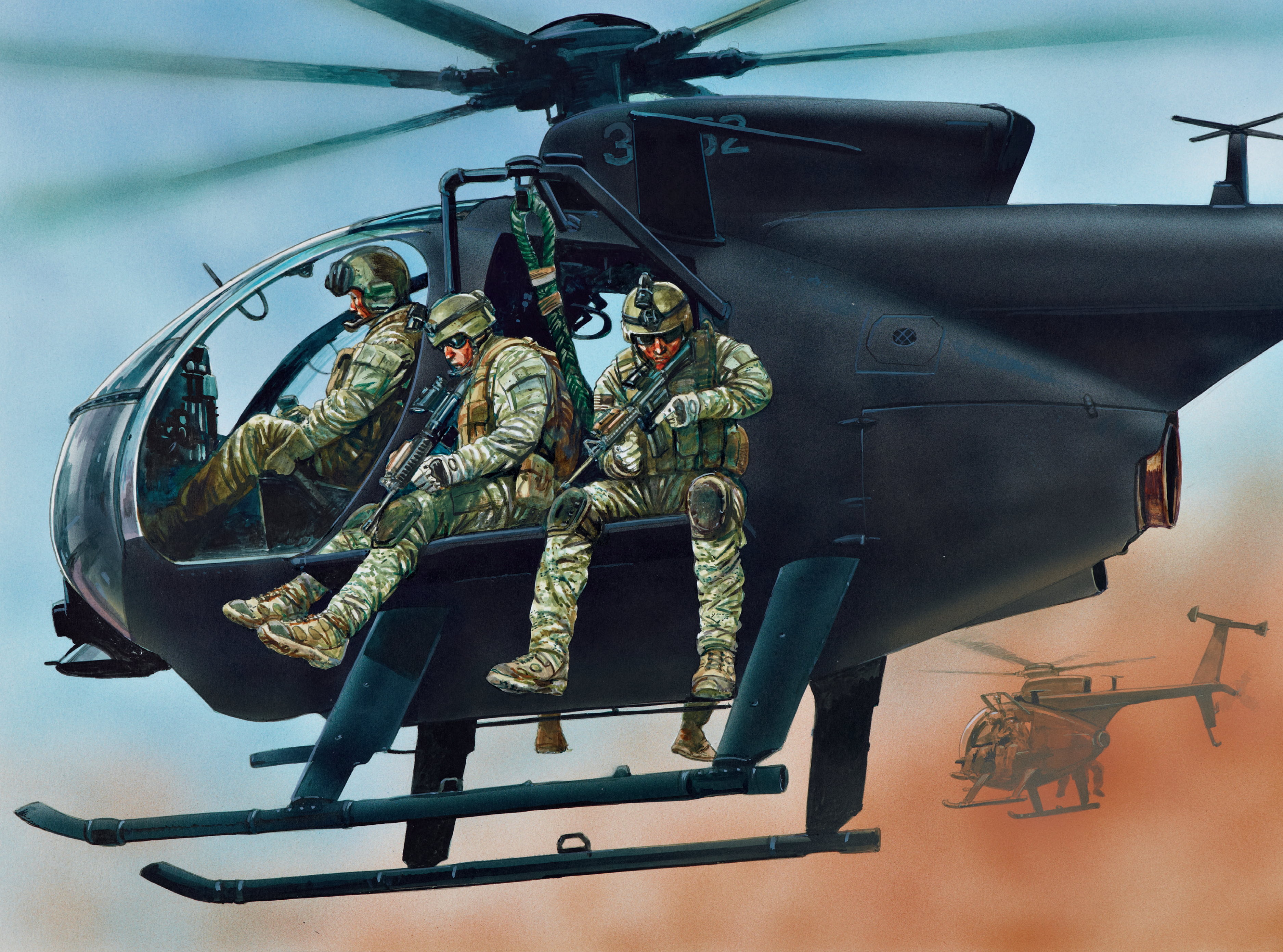
MH-6 LITTLE BIRD, *c.*2007

An MH-6 Little Bird flown by pilots of the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, with Ranger passengers perched on its "people pod" benches (known officially as the External Personnel System). Employing the larger MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter obliges Rangers to fast-rope down, whereas the MH-6 can insert them directly into a city street or onto the roof of a target building (known as infiltrating "onto the X"). The Fast Rope Insertion/Extraction System (FRIES) shown directly above the Rangers gives additional tactical flexibility. Despite appearances the helicopters are not actually painted black, but a very dark drab green.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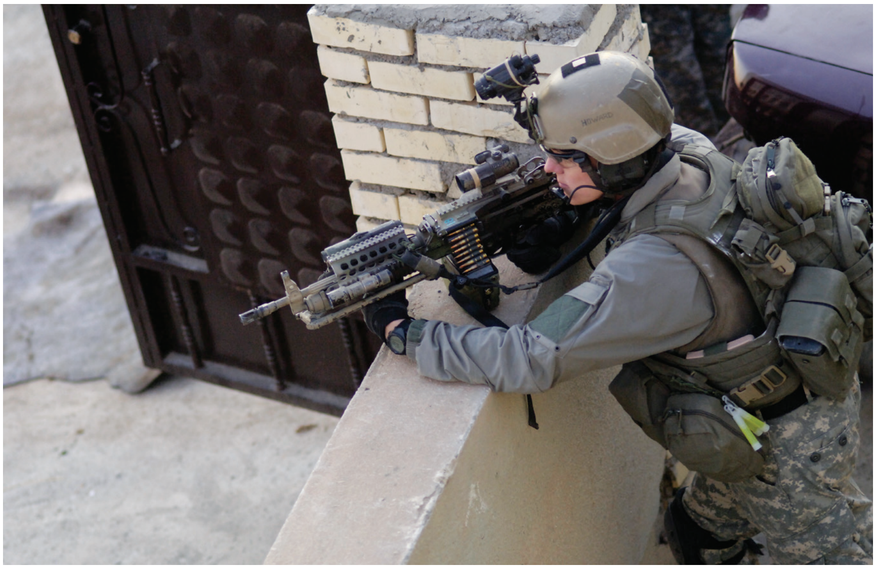
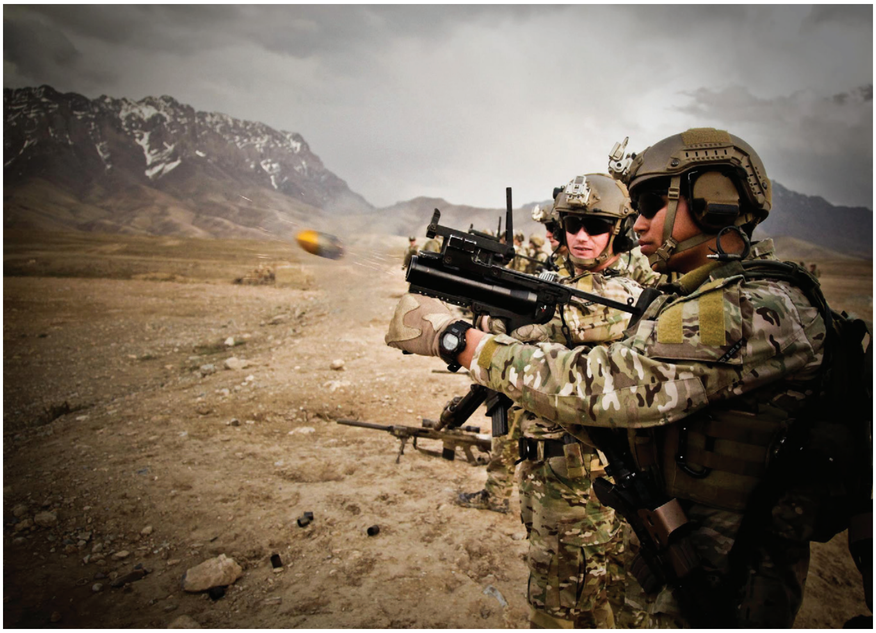
A Ranger squad light machine-gunner on a rooftop in Mosul, Iraq, affording a left-side view of a Mk 46 light machine gun fitted with an M68 Aimpoint optic. Again, note the Ranger's PCU jacket, and the square of glint tape fixed to the top of his helmet as a means of identification to "overhead assets" such as helicopter gunships and the AC-130s. (Courtesy 75th Ranger Regiment)



resistant to small-arms fire. The heaviest weapon normally deployed by the Rangers on direct-action missions is the 84mm M3 Carl Gustav RAWS, nicknamed "the Goose."

The mortar platoon commanded by the battalion HQ has available 81mm and 120mm tubes that can be attached to individual companies or platoons as required. The 60mm mortar from the company weapons platoon was often deployed in Afghanistan as part of the security element on the perimeter of an objective, or as part of a fire-support group along with the machine guns, sniper teams, and a "Goose" team. The Regiment also have available the FGM-148 Javelin Antitank Guided Missile, a fire-and-forget weapon (i.e. in contrast to wire-guided missiles); this offers a "top attack" option that proved ideal for engaging targets within the walls of Afghan compounds.



Marksmanship training in Kabul Province, Afghanistan, March 2012. Visible in the air is a just-fired 40mm grenade from a standalone M320 launcher. Note in the background the suppressed M110 or Mk 11 marksman rifle fitted with a bipod. (Courtesy Dept of Defense; photo US Army Sgt Matthew Freire)

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INDEX

Note: page numbers in bold refer to illustrations, captions and plates. All weapons and equipment are US.

Abrams M1A1 tank 44, 47
Aidid, Mohammed Farah 18, 21–22
aircraft 17, 33, 37
airfield-seizure role 11, 15–16, 26, 28, 39–40, 54, **56**, 57, **F**(**48**)
AN/PVS-15 night-vision goggles **8**
antiaircraft fire 15, 20, 30
armored vehicle upgrades 25

Bakara Market, the 21, 22
Battle of the Black Sea, the **22**, 22–24, **23**, 25
bin Laden, Usama 29
Black Hawk Down (book/film) 18, 22
blocking positions 16, 20, 22, 28, 32, **32**, **36**, 47, 48
body armor **21**, **A**13(**12**), **B**19(**18**), **29**, **38**, **40**, 41

camouflage **6**, 7, **32**, 33, **46**, 59, **A**13(**12**), **D**(**34**)35
cancellation of Baghdad International Airport mission 39–40
casualties and losses **12**, 15–16, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31–32, 37, 38–39, 44–46, 47, 50, 51
"chalks" for paratroopers 20, 30, **53**
COIN (counterinsurgency tasks) 34
combat camera crew inclusion 28
CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue) **21**, 22–23, **B19**(**18**)
CST (Cultural Support Teams) 57

Dieppe raid, the 4
dropout rates 8

evolution of the modern Rangers 4, 5–7
  perception and role of 54–57, **56**
"Extortion One Seven" tragedy 38–39

F3EAD policy 50
FARPs (Forward Area Refuelling Points) 17, 28, 29, 40
FRIES (Fast Rope Insertion/Extraction System) mounts **10**, **H**(**61**)**62**

GMV (Ground Mobility Vehicle) **28**, 48, **48**, 51, **54**, **F**(**48**)**49**

Haditha Dam seizure 42–46, **C**(**26**)
helicopters
  AC-130 Spectre gunship 14, 15, 26, 33, 37, 48, 51, **62**
  AH-6 Little Bird 14, 15, 17, 22, 24, 28, 29, 37, 41, 43, 44, 48, 51
  AH-64A Apache 14, 15
  AH-64D Longbow Apache 37, 50
  CH-46 Sea Knight 46–47
  MH-6 Little Bird **10**, **14**, 15, **20**, 22, 23, 41, **H**(**61**)**62**
  MH-47E Chinook **9**, 15, **16**, 17, 30, 33, 37, 41, 48, 50
  MH-60K Black Hawk 28, 41, 48
  MH-60L Black Hawk 16, 17, **21**, 22, 23, 41, **53**
HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) 39, 40, 44
Hussein, Saddam 42

insignia **4**, **5**, **A**13(**12**), **B**19(**18**)
insurgent weapons find **50**
Iranian influence 52
Iraqi microwave relay tower attack 17–18
ISAF, the 32, 37

JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) 6, 12, 17, 20, 26, 31, 33, 36, 37, **38**, 39, 50, 56–57
JSOTF (Joint Special Operations Task Force) 17, 18, 20, 34

LRRP (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) companies 5–6

M1126 Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle 50, **54**, **G**(54)55
McChrystal, Gen Stanley 25, 34, 50, 56
medals and honours **4**, 34, 46
METs (Mission Essential Tasks) 57
MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System) **25**
MOUT (Military Operations on Urban Terrain) training **8**
MPC (Multi-Purpose Canine Program) **D**(**34**)**35**
museums **23**

NAI (Named Area of Interest) operations 37
Noriega, Manuel Antonio 11, 15, 16

Objective Beaver 41, **41**
Objective Crescent Lake 53–54
Objective Reindeer 48–50
Objective Rhino 26–28
Objective Serpent 41–42
operational templates for deployment 16, 17, 20, 41, **41**, 53
Operations
  Anaconda (March 2002) 29–30, **30**
  Desert Storm (1991) 16–18, **A**13(**12**)
  Eagle Claw (April 1980) 6
  Enduring Freedom (Oct 2001–present) 26–39, **29**, **30**, **31**, **32**, **36**, **37**, **38**, **39**, **60**, **B**(**18**)**19**, **C**(**26**)**27**, **D**(**34**)**35**
  Gothic Serpent (Aug–Oct 1993) 18–25, **20**, **21**, **22**, **23**, **A**(**12**)**13**, **B**(**18**)**19**
  Iraqi Freedom (March 2003–Dec 2011) 39–54, **40**, **41**, **42**, **46**, **47**, **48**, **50**, **51**, **52**, **53**, **54**, **62**, **C**(**26**)**27**, **E**(**44**)**45**, **F**(**48**)**49**
  Just Cause (Dec 1989–Jan 1990) 11–15, **12**, **14**, **A13**(**12**)
  Urgent Fury (Oct 1983) 7
organizational structure 10–11

parachute drops 14–15, 18, 26, 29, 40, 41–42
Pointe du Hoc assault 4–5
POW rescue 5

RACK (Ranger Assault Carrying Kit) **40**, **B19**(**18**)
Ranger Creed, the **5**, 41
RASP (Ranger Assessment & Selection Program) 8–10, 57
reconnaissance 21, 22, 25, 30, 36, 56–57
rescue of Pvt Jessica Lynch 46–47
rifle companies 11
RIP (Ranger Indoctrination Program) 8
ROE (rules of engagement) 37, 39
RPG fire 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 38, 43, 47, 48, 50
RRC (Regimental Reconnaissance Company) 10, **38**, 56
RRD (Ranger Reconnaissance Detachment) 25, 29, 33, 52, 56, **C**(**26**)**27**
RSOV (Ranger Special Operations Vehicle **E**(**44**)**45**
RSTB (Regimental Special Troops Battalion) 10–11

SAS, the 17, 52
SECRET clearance 9
security-and-isolation operations **51**, 51–52, 54
seizure of Tocumen/Torrijos International Airport 15–16
SMUs (Special Mission Units) 6
SNA (Somali National Alliance), the 18, 21
SOCOM (Special Operations Command) 26, **29**, 48, 60
"squirters" 16, 38, 39
SSEs (sensitive site exploitation) 41, 50, 52, 54
"Super Six One" crash site **21**, 22, 23, 24, **B**(18)
supporting assets 11, 12, 25, 28

Takur Ghar (Battle of Roberts Ridge) 30-31, **30**
Taliban, the 28, 29, 32, **32**, 33, 34, 36, 37
Task Force organization 12–15, **14**, 29, 34, 39
Task Force 17 52–53
Task Force 20 39–40, 44, 46
Task Force North 50–52, **51**
Task Force Ranger 20–22, 24
Task Force Red 12, **14**, 15–16, 50, **52**, 56
Team Merrill 36–37
Tillman, Cpl Pat 31–32
training 4, 5, 6, 7–10, **8**, **9**, **10**, **16**, 25, **25**, **56**, **62**, **C**(**26**)

uniforms and equipment **4**, **24**, **29**, **31**, **33**, **37**, **42**, **46**, 47, **50**, **51**, **52**, **57**, **58**, **59**, **62**, **A**(**12**)**13**, **B**(**18**)**19**, **C**(**26**)**27**, **D** (**34**)**35**
UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in SOMalia) 18
US Army
  27th Engineer Bn 4
  75th Ranger Regiment 6, 7
  1st Bn 4, 6, 10, 14, **14**, 15, 17–18, 26, 29, 37, 40, 47–48
  A Co 30, 36, **40**, 40–41, 47
  B Co 32–33, 47
  C Co 41, 47, 58
  2nd Bn 4, 6, **7**, **8**, 10, **16**, 34, 37, 47,48, **56**
  B Co **31**, 40, 41, **41**, 47, 48, 53
  C Co 31, 51, **54**
  3rd Bn 7, 10, **12**, 14, 16, 26, 29, 36, 40, **57**
  A Co 41, 43
  B Co 20, **20**, **21**, 28, 29, 43, 44
  C Co 40, 43
  160th SOAR (Special Operations Aviation Regt) 6, **10**, 12, 14, 16, **16**, 20, 24, 28, 30, 39, 41, 44, **53**
  327th Infantry Rgmt 50
  475th Infantry Regt ("Merrill's Marauders") **5**, 5–6
  Delta Force 16, 17, 20–21, 34, 47
  SEAL Team 6 6, 12, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 41, **41**, 47, 52

VSO (Village Stability Operations Program) 37–38

weapons **29**, 57-62
  .50cal M2 heavy machine gun **28**, **54**, **F**(48)**49**, **G**(54)**55**
  84mm AT-4 (M136) unguided antitank weapon 11
  Colt 727 Carbine **6**, **B**(18)**19**
  FGM-148 Javelin Antitank Guided Missile (ATGM) 11, 62
  M4 Carbine 25, 58
  M16A2 rifle 25, 58, **A**(12)13
  M107 SASR **B**(18)**19**, 59
  M240B medium machine gun 9, 30, **32**, **38**, 60, **F**(48)**49**
  M2HB-QCB heavy machine gun **14**, **E**(44)**45**
  M320 grenade launcher 60, **62**
  Mk 16 SCAR (Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle 58–59
  Mk 46 light machine gun 60, **60**, **62**
  Mk 48 medium machine gun **42**, **56**
  RAWS (M3 Carl Gustav Ranger Antitank Weapons System) 11, **14**, 17, **32**, **33**, 43, 62
  SOPMOD Block 2 M4A1 carbine **8**, **36**, **38**, **42**, **47**, 50, **56**, 58, **58**, **59**, **C**(26)27, **D**(34)**35**
  SR-25 rifle 59, **B**19(18)
women in the Rangers 57
World War II operations 4–5

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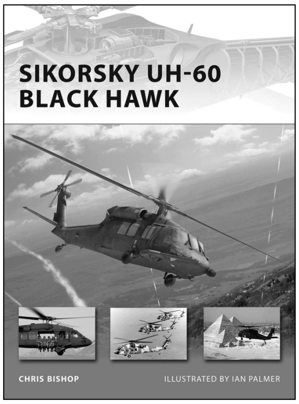
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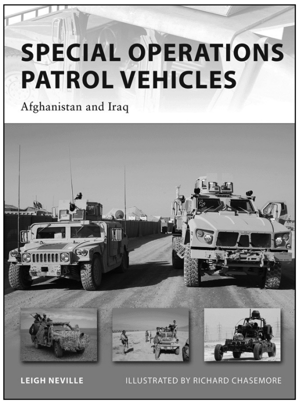
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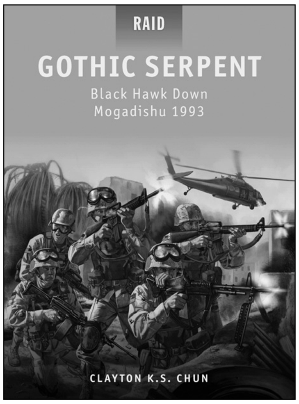
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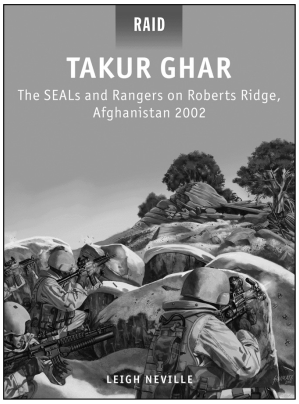
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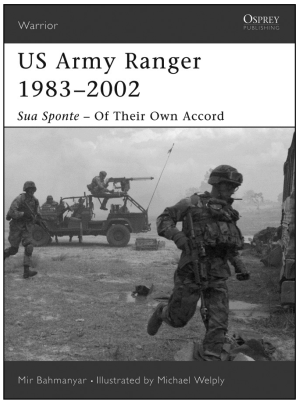
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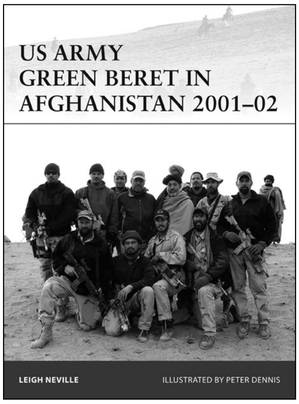
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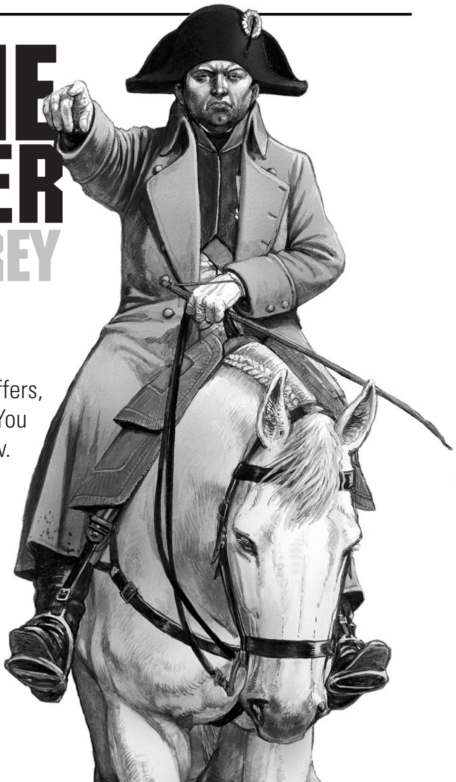

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